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ELH

A Journal of English Literary History

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UNCONSCIOUS EXPECTATIONS IN THE READING OF POETRY

By MEYER HOWARD ABRAMS

No one is born able to read poetry. We learn to read it only as we learn to perform any complex activity, through instruction, and more important, through practice. That is, we apply ourselves to specific poems and inaugurate a process of tentative adaptations, marked by success or failure in comprehension, and ultimately, resulting in the acquirement of certain interpretative habits and skills. No matter what his innate sensibility and critical principles, a man does not become a proficient reader until he can bring to the understanding of a new poem a large number of such pre-established patterns of response to the printed word. Some of these patterns of response come to be explicit, in the form of stated demands that poems exhibit specific elements of structure and content. Many patterns of response, however, remain implicit, and manifest themselves only as unspoken anticipations concerning the subject, or the metre, or the vocabulary, or the figurative constructions to be found in a poem,—in short, as an intricate set of expectations and prepared reactions of which the reader himself may be largely unaware.

It is partly by means of these acquired responses that we are able to interpret poetry at all. The trouble is, however, that the patterns of response formed by adaptation to one kind of poetry may be more or less inappropriate to poetry of a different order. To introduce an analogy: our interpretative habits

compose a kind of spectacles through which a poem must penetrate before it can be enjoyed. But the same spectacles which serve to bring the poetry of, let us say, Shelley into perfect focus, may blur and distort the poetry of Dryden beyond possibility of appreciation.

Let me illustrate how the very skills of an experienced reader may come to limit the range of his appreciation, by citing certain elements in the criticism of Doctor Johnson. There could be no more apt a subject for analysis, because, though Johnson applied to poetry an almost unexampled minuteness of scrutiny, our own perspective has shifted so sharply that we are able to recognize the limitations, as well as the powers, of the spectacles through which he gazed. There is not space to consider how many of Johnson's prepossessions about poetry may derive from his manner of reading, as well as from his critical principles,—his condemnation of mythology, for example; or his preference for poems which are perfectly unambiguous, to all people, at first sight; or his prescription of words which "become low by the occasions to which they are applied, or the general character of them who use them. . . ."[1] Instead, two aspects of Johnson's approach to poetry must stand in the place of many: his treatment of metaphor, and his treatment of metre.

A number of critics in the generation of Dr. Johnson thought it necessary to go to considerable pains to justify and delimit the use of poetic metaphors. These were held to be an indispensable means of adorning the bald matter of a poem; but it was considered that they might be deceptive, and that they certainly ran the danger of easily becoming extravagant, or obscure. We find that metaphors and similes were admitted to poetry only under certain strict conditions. The two foremost rhetoricians of the day, Lord Kames and Hugh Blair, systematically laid down a long list of such restrictions: a metaphor must be briefly presented and quickly dropped; there ought not to be more than one metaphor to a sentence; a metaphor must never, never be mixed, or broken; and so on.[2] An

[1] Rambler, No. 168.

[2] See Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (1762), chap. 20; and Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1793), lecture 15.

instance or two in which Dr. Johnson discussed metaphors will reveal how narrow were the limits a similar manner of reading imposed on the free play of poetic language.

John Dryden, in his fable, "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy," had used the phrase.

> And bees [bring] their honey redolent of spring.

The figure pleased Thomas Gray, who introduced a variation upon it into his ode "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College." Of the "gales" that blew to him from the Eton of his boyhood, Gray said:

> My weary soul they seem to soothe,
> And, redolent of joy and youth,
> To breathe a second spring.

Gray, by the way, risked no chances that the allusion be overlooked; in a fashion inevitably reminiscent of a poet of our own day, he took care to identify its origin in a note!

This is Johnson's comment on the passage, in his *Life of Gray*:

> Gray thought his language more poetical as it was more remote from common use: finding in Dryden "honey redolent of Spring," an expression that reaches the utmost limits of our language, Gray drove it a little more beyond common apprehension, by making "gales" to be "redolent of joy and youth."

Now whether we like these figures or not, certainly both of them, far from being "beyond common apprehension," are instantly intelligible to any modern reader of poetry. Even Gray's expression seems not the least bit complex, unless in an effort to explain its workings we analyze "gales . . . redolent of joy and youth" as elliptical, perhaps, for "gales bearing odors similar to odors I remember from the days of my happy childhood." Then it may begin to seem queer that "gales" should smell of the abstractions "joy," and "youth," and "spring"; but upon such inspection, almost any metaphor would seem queer. Clearly, what Johnson did was to analyze the passage in the very process of reading it: he habitually interposed the demand that he understand how a figure works, and the qualification that its foundation be neither far-fetched nor difficult to discover, before allowing it to become poetically

effective. The result of such reading was inevitably to limit to an extreme the range and freedom and complexity of the metaphors he was able to enjoy.[3]

As one other example, take Johnson's treatment of a metaphor of Shakespeare's. In his edition of the plays, Johnson was usually far too scrupulous to emend a text merely because it offended his own sensibility. Occasionally, however, even Johnson nodded, and then he imposed changes on the language of Shakespeare which in fact betrayed his own implicit habits of reading. Thus, Macbeth's despairing cry,

> I have liv'd long enough. My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf; . . .[4]

apparently transgressed too far "the utmost limits of our language" for Johnson to attribute it even to the known metaphoric extravagance of the Elizabethans. He emended "My way of life" to "My *May* of life Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf"; with the explanation that Shakespeare probably had not written "way," because "there is no relation between the *way of life*, and *fallen into the sere*." [5]

[3] Cf. Blair, *Lectures*, lecture 15: ". . . particular care should be taken that the resemblance, which is the foundation of the metaphor, be clear and perspicuous, not far-fetched, nor difficult to discover. The transgression of this rule makes, what are called harsh or forced metaphors, which are always displeasing, because they puzzle the reader, and, instead of illustrating the thought, render it perplexed and intricate." Also, Kames, *Elements*, chap. 20, sect. 6: ". . . a simile cannot be agreeable where the resemblance is . . . too faint."

[4] *Macbeth*, 5. 3. 22-23.

[5] For contemporary limitations on the reading of Shakespeare's metaphors, see Blair, *Lectures*, lecture 15:

> "'As glorious
> As is the winged messenger from heaven
> Unto the white upturned wondering eyes
> Of mortals, that fall back to gaze on him,
> When he bestrides the lazy pacing clouds,
> And sails upon the bosom of the air.'
>
> "Here, the angel is represented, as, at one moment, *bestriding* the clouds, and *sailing* upon the air; and upon the *bosom* of the air too; which forms such a confused picture, that it is impossible for any imagination to comprehend it."

Or see Kames, *Elements*, chap. 20, sect. 6:

> "'Malcolm.—But there's no bottom, none,
> In my voluptuousness: your wives, your daughters,

Now, what were the expectations and established reactions which Johnson applied to the reading of poetic metres? This question is of particular interest, because Johnson's attacks on the versification of the sweetest singers in the language have become one of the scandals of English criticism. Blank verse, Johnson believed, is no better than cut-up prose; of Milton's sonnets, only two are "not bad"; the songs from *Comus* are "harsh in their diction, and not very musical in their numbers"; in *Lycidas*, "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." [6] In the face of such judgments, even Johnson's staunchest defenders have thrown up their hands, and acknowledged that he was a critic who had no "ear" for verse. As Sir Leslie Stephen says of his "odd remarks upon Milton's versification": "The result is what one might expect from the attempt of a writer without an ear to sit in judgment upon the greatest master of harmony in the language." [7]

Such an explanation, however, explains nothing. There is abundance of evidence in Johnson's criticism that he was, in fact, a great lover of metric and verbal music, which with unaccustomed warmth he called "that harmony that adds force to reason, and gives grace to sublimity; that shackles attention, and governs passions." [8] Far from lacking an ear, Johnson was an uncommonly sensitive connoisseur of some kinds of verse. The scope of his enjoyment, however, was limited because he had become habituated to but a single type of versification; and, I think, one reason that Johnson found unpleasing much of the poetry of Milton, or Collins, or Gray, was because their

> Your matrons, and your maids, could not fill up
> The cistern of my lust.'
>
> "The best way to judge of this metaphor, is to convert it into a simile; which would be bad, because there is scarce any resemblance between lust and a cistern, or betwixt enormous lust and a large cistern."

[6] "Life of Milton," *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford, 1905), 1. 169. 163.

[7] *Samuel Johnson*, English Men of Letters Series (London, 1878), p. 176. Cf. J. E. Brown, *The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson* (Princeton, 1926), p. xxx: "The truth is that Johnson, who had no ear for music, provided a poor standard by which to judge any but the simpler and more regular forms of versification. Here was one critical blind spot."

[8] *Rambler*, No. 88.

numbers clashed sharply with the reading skills, the anticipations and accustomed reactions, which had been formed mainly on the numbers of Dryden and of Pope.

Pope's couplets in particular were for Johnson the nonpareil of measures, and the ultimate reach of poetic development. Pope, he said, " discovered the most perfect fabrick of English verse . . . "; " . . . to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity." [9] And from time to time, in his comments on other poets, we can catch Johnson in the very act of trying to read all measures through the patterns of habit shaped by the heroic couplet of the Augustans.

For example, in Pope's couplets almost every line is a unit in itself, separated even from its rhymed companion-line by a pause both in the sense and in the punctuation. I think it is evident that Johnson attempted to read not only the heroic couplet, but all stanza forms, and blank verse as well, single line by single line, seeking always to make each line a complete metrical entity. As he said in one instance, with reference to the deficiencies of blank verse:

> The musick of the English heroick line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can be only obtained by *the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds*, and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme.[10]

And Johnson clearly gave away the fashion in which he himself tried to read *Paradise Lost* when he added: " . . . there are only a few skilful and happy readers of Milton who enable their audience to perceive where the lines end or begin. ' Blank-verse,' said an ingenious critic, ' seems to be verse only to the eye.' " Which is, of course, to imply that to Johnson's perception, unless each line remains the unmistakable unit of the measure, unless there is a decisive auditory clue as to where one line leaves off and the next begins, verse ceases to be verse at all.

[9] " Life of Pope," *Lives* 3. 248. 251.
[10] " Life of Milton," *Lives* 1. 192. My italics.

Johnson betrayed similar prepossessions in other comments on Milton's versification. For example, he chided Milton for sometimes placing his pauses and sentence stops at less than three syllables from the beginning or end of a verse-line. His reasoning was based on the same assumption that each line must be a self-sufficient metric unit: a stop nearer than three syllables to either end of a line isolates one or two syllables which, thus cut off, break up the measure. As a result, Johnson found such passages from *Paradise Lost* as this one to be lacking in harmony:

> First in the east his glorious lamp was seen
> Regent of day; and all the horizon round
> Invested with bright rays, jocund to run
> His longitude through heaven's high road; the gray
> Dawn, and the Pleiades, before him danced,
> Shedding sweet influence.

The two syllables, "the gray," Johnson thought, cut off from the rest of the line by a semi-colon, are faulty, because "no part of a verse ought to be so separated from the rest as not to remain still more harmonious than prose, or to show, by the disposition of the tones, that it is part of a verse."[11]

This approach to metre suited Pope's couplets very well, but it was quite inappropriate to Milton's blank verse, which used as its structural unit not so much the single line as the full sentence or paragraph. It was just as inappropriate to the free, varied versification of almost any English poet before Dryden.[12] As we reconstruct Johnson's process of reading, then, we begin to understand the paradox that he could be so sensitive and discerning before the poetry of Dryden and Pope, yet so obtuse before much of the poetry of any other school of writers. In the light of such discoveries, it becomes evident that the poems of a pre-Augustan writer, seen through Johnson's spectacles, must have been something far different from the same poems as they appear to the common reader of our own day. And there sug-

[11] *Rambler*, No. 90. Cf. "Life of Milton," *Lives* 1. 192: "The variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer."

[12] What such habits did for the writing, rather than reading, of blank verse is evidenced by Johnson's practice in his own blank-verse tragedy, *Irene*. So dominant was Pope's example, that not only are most of the lines studiously end-stopped, but often each pair of lines is so isolated by pauses that the verse tends, in everything but rhyme, to fall into a closed-couplet structure. See *e. g.*, act 5, scene 12.

gests itself the question just what Shakespeare, for example, was like, when read through all of Johnson's explicit and tacit expectations regarding subject, vocabulary, metaphor, and versification.

Of course, Johnson praised Shakespeare more lavishly than he did any other writer, so the temptation is to say that Shakespeare's greatness was so transcendant that it overwhelmed all Johnson's usual tastes and standards. Such an opinion, however, exhibits a basic fallacy; it assumes that all men who admire the same author, do so for the same reasons. The significant point is not that Johnson admired Shakespeare, but what he admired Shakespeare for. And if we read Johnson's "Preface" carefully, we find he admired Shakespeare most as the "poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life"; as an inventor of characters who "are the genuine progeny of common humanity"; as a writer whose plays are filled "with practical axioms and domestick wisdom."[13] This is Shakespeare "the poet of nature," the creator of character, the moralist; these and other elements of Shakespeare's dramas were in accord both with Johnson's manner of reading and his critical principles, and they sufficed to win his highest commendation. But when Johnson spoke of the language, "the diction," of the dramatic poet, his judgments were much more qualified. He paid no such glowing tributes to Shakespeare's language as he did to Pope's; rather, he found that whenever Shakespeare "solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity." "In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction, and a wearisome train of circumlocution. . . ."

> We fix [he said] our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what we should in another loathe or despise. . . . I have seen, in the book of some modern critick, a collection of anomalies, which shew that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation. . . .[14]

This is strong language from an admirer of Shakespeare. And if we remember the wide discrepancy between Johnson's reading of metaphor and metre and the normal practice of Shakespeare, it becomes apparent that we must interpret quite liter-

[13] *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Murphy (London, 1820), 2. 80-81.
[14] *Ibid.* 92. 113-114.

ally Johnson's repeated affirmation that "Shakespeare never has six lines together without a fault."[15] The same spectacles which helped make Johnson's appreciation of Pope keener and more discriminating than a modern reader may hope to match, contributed toward making Shakespeare out to be, in some ways, one of the faultiest writers ever to hold a pen.

Johnson, it seems, read Shakespeare through habits formed mainly on the poetry of Pope; later, the generation of Wordsworth misunderstood Pope because he had not written like Shakespeare; later still, many critics found themselves able to enjoy no poets who had not written after the fashion of Shelley, or Keats, or Tennyson. And what, we may ask, of our own day? What invisible spectacles saddle our noses when we take up a poem?

This is the most eclectic of ages, in its reading of poetry as in everything else. Perhaps the largest number of contemporary readers have formed their sensibility on the poetry of the Romantics; but there are some readers, particularly in academic circles, who truly appreciate nothing which departs too far from the models of Dryden and of Pope. Most striking, however, is the recent appearance of an excellent and influential body of critics who seem to have formed their manner of reading largely on the poetry of the metaphysical school. T. S. Eliot is of that number, to some degree. So are Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks,[16] both of whom evaluate poems mainly by their approximation to the combined seriousness and irony, and to the metaphoric structure peculiar to the school of Donne. It is because these critics appear not only to judge, but even to read poetry through criteria and anticipations shaped by the practice of Donne, that their comments on poems falling within the metaphysical tradition prove so apt and illuminating; while their judgments on passages from Shelley, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson, seem so often to fall wide of the mark.

[15] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill (New York, 1891) 2. 110-111.

[16] See, e. g., Allen Tate's dictum, in *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (New York and London, 1936), p. 80, that it is "the strain between images and rhythm, opposites 'yoked by violence together' in varying degrees of violence, that gives to English lyrical verse its true genius"; and his lament that this poetic method dies out in the eighteenth century, to "reappear in the nineteenth century perhaps in Landor and Browning alone." See also Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill, 1939), especially chap. 10.

I suppose the extreme instance of this manner of reading is to be found in John Crowe Ransom's essay, "Shakespeare at Sonnets." Ransom assumes that if not in his plays, at least in his sonnets, Shakespeare often did "deliberately intend" metaphysical effects. It follows that "the simplest way to define Shakespeare's metaphysical accomplishment would be by comparison with Donne's, which is standard."[17] It is not, then, to be wondered that Ransom's highest compliment is the admission that in sonnet CXXI, "the language of the opening quatrain sounds close and technical enough for a passage of Donne's"; nor ought it to, though Ransom says it does, surprise us that almost all of Shakespeare's sonnets turn out to be merely inferior attempts to write like Donne:

> . . . the thing which surprises us is to find no evidence anywhere that Shakespeare's imagination is equal to the peculiar and systematic exercises which Donne imposed habitually upon his. None, and it should not really surprise us, if we remember that Donne's skill is of the highest technical expertness in English, and that Shakespeare had no university discipline and developed poetically along lines of least resistance.[18]

It is not unjust to say that Ransom's set manner of reading is, in its own way, no less narrow and exclusive than Johnson's. Johnson read Shakespeare through the spectacles of Pope; and Wordsworth read Pope through the spectacles of Shakespeare; but Ransom appears to read Shakespeare, and Pope, and Wordsworth, too, through the spectacles of Donne.

If the best of our critics prove so fallible, what must be the plight of the ordinary reader? For all of us alike, I suppose, the only remedy is a constant vigilance, lest our skills in reading harden and become unadaptive to any but a limited range of poetry. Ideally, each time he picks up a new poem, a reader must prepare himself to endure the effort and strain of adjusting his mental sets and prepared reactions to meet a possibly novel mode of communication, before he undertakes to praise or blame. After all, that is the only way he can make it reasonably certain that if he rejects the poem, it is because he does not like it, and not because he has not read it.

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[17] In *The World's Body* (New York and London, 1938), pp. 303, 287.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 286.

THE TROJAN BACKGROUND OF THE *TROILUS*

By Robert D. Mayo

Two distinguished Chaucerians, Professors G. L. Kittredge and John Livingston Lowes, have found the *Troilus* to be a poem loaded with feeling of impending doom, involving not only the fate of the hero but that of the Trojan city itself. In *Chaucer and his Poetry*, Professor Kittredge has written:

> The fate which darkens the loves of Troilus and Cressida is strangely intensified (in our apprehension of it) by the impending doom of Troy. This is no mere rhetorical analogue—no trick of symbolism. Their drama is an integral part of the great Trojan tragedy. They are caught in the wheels of that resistless mechanism which the gods have set in motion for the ruin of the Trojan race. This is a vital, determining fact in their history, as Chaucer understands it, and he leaves us in no doubt as to its intense significance . . . again and again we are reminded, as the tale proceeds, of the inevitable outcome of the ten years' war . . .
>
> Always and everywhere we are oppressed by the coming doom of the city . . . from first to last the loves of Troilus and Cressida are bound up with the inexorable doom that hangs over the city. The fate of Troy is their fate.[1]

Professor Lowes concurs in this impression of the *Troilus*, and finds himself similarly oppressed by the pall that overhangs Troy.

> We are conscious, as the story runs its course, [he writes] of a twofold background: a setting, on the one hand, within the beleaguered city . . . of utter urbanity and grace; while, on the other hand, never for long out of consciousness, and passing at intervals sharply from background to foreground, looms the siege. And that sense of impending fate lends to the gayety and beauty of the earlier episodes, as we recall them, a peculiar poignancy.[2]

[1] George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and his Poetry* (Cambridge, 1915), pp. 119-21.

[2] John Livingston Lowes, *Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of his Genius* (Boston, 1934), p. 180. Cf. also W. C. Curry, "Destiny in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *PMLA* 45 (1930). 135, who writes: "Still one is made to feel—by means of references to this or that planet, by striking suggestions of destructive influences hanging over the doomed city of Troy, and by mysterious intimations of tragedy announced by dreams, oracles, and divinations—that the days of Troy are numbered

Both of the above statements, the present writer believes, give an erroneous impression of the *Troilus* and are in some degree anachronistic in their description of Chaucer's narrative art.

We can hardly doubt that Chaucer intended his readers to obtain a definite impression of personal doom for his hero. Judging by the comment which it has aroused, Troilus' fatal destiny is one of the obvious features of the poem. The tragic issue of his love is laid down in the opening lines, and repeated for emphasis after the dolorous invocation to Tisiphone. During the first half of the poem, it is true, while his fortunes are changing "fro wo to wele," the feeling of fatality is not strong. Chaucer makes no further allusions to Criseyde's betrayal or to his hero's doom, and the references to fortune and the stars, after the story is under way, are fairly negative in coloring. The spirit of the first three books is that of sprightly romantic comedy only lightly touched by the grim promise of tragedy made in the opening stanzas. But once the peak of Troilus' felicity is reached, the poet returns to his earlier note of prophetic gloom, and through Books IV and V reminds us periodically of the futility of Troilus' hopes and desires. This mood is powerfully reinforced by Troilus' forebodings of evil, and in the last book by showing Criseyde's betrayal of her lover before turning back to describe Troilus' pathetic vigil on the walls of Troy.

So much of Troilus' "fatal destyne"—a theme which is definitely enunciated at the outset and beyond dispute a dominant idea during the second half of the poem. But if Chaucer intended to convey a similar impression of Troy's doom, as Professors Kittredge and Lowes both affirm, the idea, certainly, is not voiced either at the beginning or at the close, and receives scant attention during the greater part of the poem. True, we are told in the opening explanations that the city is to be destroyed—this is the necessary motivation for Calchas' flight which Chaucer found in Boccaccio. But the fact is merely stated, not enforced, and the poet expressly disclaims any epic aspirations.

and that the cloud of fate hovering over Troilus and Criseyde will presently overwhelm them in the general disaster."

But how this town com to destruccion
Ne falleth naught to purpos me to telle;
For it were here a long digression
Fro my matere, and yow to long to dwelle;
But the Troian gestes, as they felle,
In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,
Whoso that kan may rede hem as they write.[3]

Neither Professor Kittredge nor Professor Lowes, however, is quite willing to take Chaucer at his word. Both imply that he means to suggest something of what he here renounces, and that the impendent doom of Troy is skillfully employed as a kind of secondary motif to support and intensify the feelings of Troilus' fatality.

Professor Kittredge makes much of the fact that the lovers' drama is " an integral part " of the whole Troy story and that therefore the tragedies of both are irrevocably linked in Chaucer's poem. " The fate of Troy is their fate," he writes. " Their story begins in the temple of the Palladium; it is Calchas' foreknowledge and the people's infatuation that tear them asunder; it is the peril of the town that thwarts woman's wit, until Diomede subdues the inconstant heart. The tragedy of character grows out of the tragedy of situation." [4] In a limited sense, of course, we must allow the history of Troy to be a " determining fact " in the love tragedy. But this fact does not necessarily make the fate of Troy an affective force in the poem. These circumstances do not of themselves create an atmosphere of doom about the city. All of the essential links with Troy's history which Professor Kittredge cites, together with the whole outline and background of the love story, are taken from the *Filostrato*—a poem in which it would not occur to anyone to be stirred by the impending fate of Troy.[5] Unless the poet *creates* and *sustains* such an impression by the con-

[3] *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Robert Kilburn Root (Princeton, 1926), 1. 141-47. Hereafter all quotations will be made from Professor Root's edition.

[4] Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[5] The extent to which Chaucer's treatment of the siege is merely carried over from the *Filostrato* makes the following eulogy extravagant: " But, like a true tragedian, he [Chaucer] conceives the brilliant idea of throwing the lamentable history of the two lovers against the dark background of the Trojan war, which has already progressed nearly ten bloody years and which is on the point of ending with the fall of the great city " (Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 135).

sistent use of suggestion—by recurrent allusions to the peril of the siege, by the attitudes expressed by his characters, by the manipulation of supporting detail—we cannot admit the doom of Troy to be a real esthetic factor in the poem. Let us examine the evidence.

In Book I, once the stage is set and the two lovers are introduced, there are at best seven separate references to the Greeks, the siege, or the war in general, in about 1000 lines. (1) Fired by a wish to recommend himself to Criseyde, Troilus loses all fear of the siege, we are told, and accomplishes such feats of arms that the Greeks dread him " as the deth." (2) Finding him " bywayling in his chambre," Pandarus asks him mockingly if fear of the Greeks has made him grow thus lean, and (3) is answered that more than aught their enemies have yet wrought has caused this sickness. (4) Troilus admits that he so burns with desire that he would rather die than be king of both Greece and Troy. (5) Then, when he refuses to reveal Criseyde's name, Pandarus argues that if he dies without doing so, she will think he has perished out of fear of the siege. (6) Later, inspired by Pandarus' promise of aid, Troilus cries " fy on the Grekes alle," and vows to make them suffer for his love; and (7) subsequently when he rides to battle, says Chaucer, " Wo was that Greek that with hym mette a day! "[6] After his opening explanations the poet makes no further allusion to Troy's fate in the first book.

The final effect of these passages is hardly one of pregnant gloom. Most of them seem quite incidental to the narrative, and it is difficult to see how any but a very sentimental reader could feel that they impart an atmosphere of doom to the poem or cast an ominous shadow over the romantic posturings of the lovesick hero. Two of them are uttered by Pandarus in jest, and at least three are expressive of Trojan might. Four of the seven are merely carried over from the *Filostrato*.

In the whole of Book II there are but six references to the war, and none to Troy's destiny. All six are similar in tone to those which have been described. Only one—Criseyde's impulsive confession of fear—could be construed as portentous for

[6] (1) 1. 463-83; (2) 547-53; (3) 577-79; (4) 607-9; (5) 799-802; (6) 1044-50; (7) 1072-75.

Troy. On his first visit to Criseyde, Pandarus finds his niece listening with her ladies to the story of the siege of Thebes. He seeks to pique her interest in his mission by saying that he knows " a thyng " to make her glad.

> " Now uncle deere," quod she, " telle it us,
> For goddes love; is than thassege aweye?
> I am of Grekes fered so that I deye."
> " Nay, nay," quod he, " as evere mote I thryve,
> It is a thing wel bet than swyche fyve." [7]

But is this not Chaucerian comedy of character, more than a presage of doom—a delicate display of " slydynge corage," rather than a note of warning about Troy? The " geste of the sege of Thebes," a chronicle of Greek savagery in which a city was razed to the ground, was timely reading for the Trojan women, and the impressionable Criseyde for some moments after she puts aside the book is still under its sway. This is an amusing example of feminine disposition, quite in the mood of the spirited scenes that follow. In citing it as testimony of Troy's darkening fate, Professor Kittredge, I believe, exaggerates its effect upon our feelings. It is the only occasion in the whole poem when a character in the city expresses unqualified fear of the war. Certainly any suggestion of defeat it might leave with us would be nullified by the passages that follow which praise the devastating valour of Hector and Troilus, and show the latter returning from battle, battered but victorious.[8]

Book III displays even less concern with the siege. Besides one casual reference to Achilles and Agamemnon, it contains only a mention of Troilus' seeking a sign from Apollo " when the Grekes sholden flee," and two further references to his inspired feats of arms.[9] In the first three books of the *Troilus*, therefore, we can hardly say that the siege has any very " intense significance " for the narrative apart from mere plot, or, to use Professor Lowes' phrase, that it " looms " ominously

[7] *Troilus* 2. 122-26.
[8] *Troilus* 2. 153-203; 610-44.
[9] *Troilus* 3. 372-85; 540-46; 436-38; 1772-78. Professor Lowes calls Books II and III " the two great crucial books . . . the heart of the poem." (*Op. cit.*, p. 170). Yet in them the siege seems very remote.

at the reader. The issue of the struggle, although foretold by Calchas' prophecy, has not yet been decided on the battlefield, and Chaucer makes no effort to direct attention to the final outcome. Hector—" the townes wal, and Grekes yerde "—is still alive, and before his death in Book V almost nothing is told us of the siege that marks any progress or direction in the war. The glimpses we get of the fighting have no existence separate from the love story, anl they are too vaguely general to convey any vivid impression of the city's destiny at stake. Troy's fate is not once mentioned between the twenty-first stanza of Book I and the fourth book.

Book IV brings the siege more prominently into the foreground, for it deals with the events which lead to the separation of lovers: the capture of Antenor; the truce; Calchas' plea for Criseyde's exchange; and the action of the Trojan parliament. But the references to the war, though more numerous, are scarcely more ominous in coloring than those we have already observed. Most of them Chaucer found in Boccaccio. True, we are told that the Trojans suffer a serious (but not decisive) defeat in the loss of Antenor, and Calchas repeats his promise of a Greek victory—both from the *Filostrato*. And Chaucer comments, in passing, on the irony of Troy's efforts for Antenor,

> For he was after traitour to the town
> Of Troye; allas, they quytte hym to rathe!
> O nyce world, lo thy discrecioun![10]

Professor Curry would arrogate to these passages the feeling of " colossal forces " at work.[11] But weighing them against the whole book, we cannot believe that they actually assume such epic importance. Chaucer completely ignores Troy's fate in the Proem, when Troilus' final destiny is recalled. His hero's railings against fortune and his reflections on free will and necessity are, significantly, untouched by the slightest suggestion of general calamity; he rebukes " cruel Fortune " for what it has done to him and Criseyde, not to Troy. His only

[10] *Troilus* 4. 204-6. Cf. also 4. 183-86.

[11] " The ancient enmity of the incensed gods still hangs over the city, and we hear closer and more pronounced rumblings, as it were, of the Fate which is soon to be unloosed upon it. How shall Troilus survive when he is caught in the maelstrom of such colossal forces? (Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 147).

fears are for her personal welfare, and neither he nor she takes any account of ultimate Trojan defeat in their plans for her return. Criseyde has only contempt for her father's auguries.

In Book V the scene shifts to the Greek camp. But here again little is told us of the war that is not germane to the personal tragedy. Calchas' prophecy is enforced upon Criseyde by Diomede, who seeks to weaken her loyalty to the city. But she spiritedly attacks his view of Troy's fate, and though we are informed that she later submits to his importunities, " breeding the cause " why she should remain, the effect of these passages upon the reader is not to make him *feel* the approaching doom of the city. They are circumstances of the story, but not themselves elements which kindle feelings of suspense. Nearly all find a place also in the *Filostrato*.

Admittedly something like an atmosphere of doom is created by the death of Hector, which precedes that of Troilus by about 250 lines. This event receives passing mention in the Italian source, but Chaucer makes more of an incident of it, and adds subjective comments of his own which link, for the moment at any rate, the fate of Troy with that of the lovers.

> Fortune, which that permutacioun
> Of thynges hath, as it is hire committed
> By purveyaunce and disposicioun
> Of heigh Jove, as regnes shal be flitted
> Fro folk in folk, or whan they shal ben smytted,
> Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troie
> Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie.[12]

Unquestionably the loss of Troy's brightest feather, to which Chaucer devotes three aditional stanzas, contributes some air of general calamity to the close of the poem. We cannot deny that the threat of Troy's imminent destruction is here implicated with Troilus' tragic destiny. The question at issue, however, is not whether this feeling is present in the poem at all, but whether it is the dominant feature which impressionistic commentators have made of it—whether it is a factor which operates, as Professor Kittredge has it, " always and everywhere " in the drama. I have tried to show that the doom of Troy, although it is mentioned at the beginning of the poem, is

[12] *Troilus* 5. 1541-47.

really a negligible factor in the first three books; and that in Book IV and most of Book V, although it figures in the story, it does not by any means attain the force of a sustained theme. The real focus of Chaucer's attention throughout is the love story, and the struggle within the soul of his hero, with its philosophical implications. The " fatal destyne " introduced in the Proem to Book V is patently the hero's, not Troy's. All of Troilus' anguish, after parting from Criseyde, is for his immediate personal loss; all of his misgivings about the future are lover's fears, which ignore the city's plight. His omnious dreams and Cassandra's reading of them are centered wholly on his own loss. And in the events which follow Hector's death Chaucer does not again allude to Troy's fate, as he might certainly be expected to were he really occupied with the double tragedy of Troilus and Troy. Instead, his hero mounts in spirit to the eighth sphere of heaven whence he looks down on earth and scoffs at the folly of those who seek " the blynde lust," in a passage which is quite devoid of any suggestion of general catastrophe. Nor does the poet's pious summary invite us to take a Hardyesque view of the scope of the tragic action:

> Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
> Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
> Swich fyn hath his estat real above!
> Swich fyn his lust! swich fyn hath his noblesse!
> Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!
> And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,
> As I have told, and in thise wise he deyde.[13]

In short, if we view the poem as a whole, we are forced to conclude that the *Troilus*—like the *Filostrato*—is intended to be a personal tragedy alone, and that to convey an epic feeling of Troy's brooding destiny and the fated " ruin of the Trojan race," however effective this *might* have been as a tragic device, does not enter except casually into Chaucer's plan. Throughout much of the poem, if it is not almost forgotten, the siege provides only a somewhat indistinct background to the love drama.

The importance which Professor Lowes and others have attached to the Trojan setting of the *Troilus*, as a matter of fact, somewhat distorts the narrative values of the poem, and dis-

[13] *Troilus* 5. 1828-34.

regards its place in literary history. Out of justifiable admiration for Chaucer's writing they attribute to him a fuller and more conscious use of background material than the poem actually shows. They describe the *Troilus* in terms which often seem more applicable to nineteenth than to fourteenth-century practice. The *Troilus* was and is one of the most remarkable poems in the language. But it is neither an epic nor a novel. As Professor Young reminds us, it is "essentially a medieval romance."[14] And we do not discount its extraordinary characterization, its rich irony, its psychological insight, and the sustained artistry of its dramatic episodes, if we say that it displays more than a few of the distinctive features of this genre. It is not in ideas and manners alone that the *Troilus* bears the impress of its age.

In medieval romance the function of background as a narrative element was fairly rudimentary—that is to say, the romancer typically depended upon other factors in his story to obtain the impression of life. Chrétien de Troyes, whose forte was realizing the romantic adventures of Arthurian legend in terms of chivalric customs and ideals, ordinarily paid scant attention to physical settings, introducing into the narrative only sufficient background detail to serve the needs of the action. There are few "scenes" in the full tableau sense in Chrétien's romances. And this is in general true of the *Troilus* likewise. Chaucer's chief method here is dramatic—vivid scenes of lifelike speech and action, connected by passages of comment and direct narration. Nearly three-fifths of the whole poem (about 4800 lines out of 8239) may be reckoned direct discourse —conversation and soliloquy. Omitting the very brief scenes, and taking as single those which occur together in or about the same spot, we may count about thirty-five dramatic episodes in the poem. Each of these, with a few exceptions, has a definite ascribed setting—Criseyde's garden, the walls of Troy, Calchas' tent in the Greek camp, and so on. But for the most part, if he is mindful of physical background at all, Chaucer indulges in only the most bald and incidental generalities. Troy is a half-medieval, half-fabulous city of palaces, temples, houses, gardens,

[14] Karl Young, "Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde' as Romance," *PMLA* 53 (1938). 62.

streets, gates, and walls. The private dwellings have stairways, halls, closets, doors and windows, tables, chairs, and beds—little else. It would be difficult for the poet to get along with less. Half a dozen of the important scenes of the love drama occur in the private chamber of Troilus; yet we know nothing of its location or appearance, except that it lies within his "palace" and contains a bed whereon he was wont to give utterance to his grief. Of the general nature of Pandarus' and Deiphobus' houses we have sufficient knowledge to understand the machinations of Pandarus—no more.

The only exception to the prevailing abstractness of Chaucer's backgrounds in the *Troilus* is the house of Criseyde. Here he offers us a few fragmentary facts about this lady's dwelling which make for a measure of concreteness. But only if we piece them together from half a dozen separate scenes can we obtain anything like a complete picture. (1) Criseyde and her ladies receive Pandarus in the "paved parlour" of her palace, where they sit reading "the Sege of Thebes." (2) Criseyde's own chamber, where she later goes to read Troilus' letter and make decisions, is apart from this central hall. (3) At one end of the parlour is a window with a seat, facing other houses across the way, and looking down on the street which leads from the gate of the city to Troilus' "palace." (4) When Pandarus sits in the window (here Chaucer offers a vivid piece of *décor*), Criseyde sits beside him on a stone of jasper with a cushion embroidered with gold. (5) Downstairs is a large garden, with railed alleyways, sanded and newly benched, and shaded with blossomy green boughs. (6) Outside the chamber where Criseyde sleeps a nightingale sings "a lay of love" upon a green cedar in the moonlight.[15] Most of these details of setting are Chaucer's own addition to the story, and in the aggregate they are sufficient to show that Chaucer visualized Criseyde's dwelling with some completeness. Yet we must admit that they are meagre enough for a poem of nearly novel length. Certainly if the great scenes of the *Troilus* have an extraordinary vividness beyond anything else in medieval narrative outside the *Canterbury Tales*, it is owing far more to the

[15] (1) *Troilus* 2. 78-84; (2) 2. 599, 1173-76, 1259; 4. 732-33; (3) 2. 610-21, 1014-15, 1185-92, 1247-53; (4) 2. 1226-29; (5) 2. 813-26, 1116-17; (6) 2. 918-22.

dramatic vitality with which Chaucer endowed his characters' speeches and actions than to any forceful rendering of physical setting.

Later narrative poets, living subsequent to the "discovery of landscape," and having before them models from romantic poetry and fiction, have been more alert to the possibilities of background detail. The *Morte D'Arthur*—to choose one from a multitude of examples—illustrates the way in which a modern poet has employed this narrative device. In this last of the *Idylls*, in which Tennyson seeks to convey an impression of the darkness, desolation, and ruin which has overtaken Arthur's goodly fellowship, he skillfully exploits physical scene to enhance the theme of the poem and intensify its mood. The passing of Arthur is laid against a wintry landscape of black cliffs and mountains, barren rocks, frozen hills, and moonlit water, swept by a chill seawind flaked with foam. Our awareness of this background, which is defined with considerable sharpness, is constantly sustained, so that it forms a powerful factor in the total impression which the poem makes upon the reader. The *Morte D'Arthur*, of course, is not a work of comparable dimensions to the *Troilus*, but the example serves to emphasize the difference between Tennyson's and Chaucer's narrative methods. Troy as a doomed city, or a city of any kind, does not thus figure in the background of the *Troilus*, although some commentators would give the opposite impression. Chaucer is actually little more interested in concrete details of setting than he is in the costumes of Criseyde or Troilus' accoutrements of battle. This does not imply any inadequacy in his mode of writing, merely that his methods were otherwise. Certainly his fourteenth-century readers felt no lack; indeed, if we are to believe Professor Tatlock,[16] they would find a curious excitement in the slight historicity of Chaucer's picture of Troy. But measured by present-day standards we cannot pretend that the setting figures very prominently in the narrative or that it has any great imaginative force. If Chaucer sometimes succeeds in conveying a keen sense of actual life in Troy, as he does in the episodes at Criseyde's

[16] Cf. John S. P. Tatlock, "The Epilogue of Chaucer's 'Troilus,'" *MP* 18 (1920-21). 128-32.

and at Deiphobus' house, it is due chiefly to the clarity and truth of the dramatic action and not because Troy has been fully *realized* in the nineteenth-century sense.

Both the subject matter and the methods of literary expression, like human knowledge itself, must be regarded as the result of cumulative experience. "Every science," wrote Dr. Johnson, "was thus far advanced toward perfection, by the emulous diligence of contemporary students, and the gradual discoveries of one age improving on another." So too with the art of fictitious narrative. If the diligent story-tellers of one age do not always "improve" on those of the last, they usually make changes in the shifting modes of literary expression which accrue to each succeeding writer according to his time. Chaucer was a sensitive and adroit teller of medieval tales, with great insight into human nature, superlative dramatic gifts, and a broad and urbane view of life. But it is idle to presume out of respect for his genius that in the *Troilus* he explored the full possibilities of narrative art or ran the whole gamut of literary effects. That he should have wrought what he did from the romances of Boccaccio and Benoit is achievement enough. Let us not make him write like Thomas Hardy and Emily Brontë too.

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DONNE'S ALCHEMICAL FIGURES

By Edgar Hill Duncan

Of the many realms of scientific theory and investigation from which Donne drew material for his metaphysical conceits, none seems farther from twentieth century thought than the medieval and renaissance science of alchemy; for modern readers, perhaps few of Donne's figures stand more in need of elucidation than do some of those based on alchemical concepts. This paper seeks to analyze the alchemical figures in Donne's poetry against a background of the theories and practices of alchemy as recorded in the compendious literature of the science current in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It has a twofold purpose: first, to demonstrate the skill with which Donne adapted alchemical concepts to poetic uses, and secondly, to help clarify, for present day readers, those figures dependent on abstruse alchemical ideas.[1]

Two limitations to such an attempt should be stated at the outset. First, renaissance alchemy was such an inclusive and heterogeneous body of knowledge and pseudo-knowledge that one cannot be certain to have detected all of the figures in Donne's poetry which may bear some affinity to it; while a few of the figures discussed herein may be said to belong, as legitimately, to some other field of scientific theorizing and investigation—as, for instance, to that of chemic medicine. The other limitation is the present incomplete state of our knowledge of the history of alchemical texts. This, together with the fact that, aside from frequent reference to Paracelsus in his prose, Donne gives no hint as to where his knowledge of alchemy was

[1] Aside from the annotations in H. J. C. Grierson's edition of the poems of John Donne (2 vols., Oxford, 1912) and a few scattered remarks by other commentators, there is a brief consideration of Donne's use of alchemy to be found in Mary Patton Ramsay's *Les Doctrines Médiévales chez Donne* (London, 1912), pp. 75-79. This, as Professor Coffin remarks (*John Donne and the New Philosophy* [New York, 1937], p. 24), "does little more than open the possibilities of the subject." Milton Allan Rugoff in *Donne's Imagery: A Study in Creative Sources* (New York, 1939) lists many of the alchemical figures to be discussed below. A close analysis of the figures in the light of alchemic theory and practice as reflected in the treatises is, of course, not within the scope of his study.

derived, makes the ascription of particular sources for his alchemical ideas extremely hazardous. It can hardly discount, however, the attempt to illustrate those ideas by references to treatises which may be fairly said to represent the alchemical *milieu* of Donne's own lifetime. That is the intent of the present undertaking.[2]

1

While, generally, Donne employs particulars of alchemical theory or practice with no reference to or judgment upon their truth or falsity, in a few cases the figures turn on an expressed or implied opinion of the science as a whole or of its practitioners. We may consider these first. In each of them the opinion of alchemy is the same as that expressed in numerous contemporary popular satires: that alchemy is largely imposture or self-deception, alchemists charlatans or self-gulling dupes, and that all attempts to get the elixir or philosopher's stone have failed.[3] The first half of this indictment is implied in these verses from *The Sunne Rising*:

[2] The alchemical works of which I have made use are these: (1) Mediaeval treatises which continued to be frequently published and to exert wide influence in the sixteenth century (*Cf.* Lynn Thorndike, *Hist. of Magic and Exp. Sci.*, Vols. 5 and 6, *Sixteenth Century* [New York, 1941], 5. 532-550, 600-51, *passim*)—the *Summa perfectionis* of Geber, the *Liber secretus* of Artephius, the *Speculum Alchemiae* attributed to Roger Bacon (an Eng. trans. of which, *The Mirror of Alkimy*, was published in 1597), the alchemical chapters of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Naturale*, the *Consideratione quintae essentiae* of John of Rupecissa, and the *Codicillus* (first printed, 1563) and *Vade mecum* belonging to the Lullian alchemical corpus; (2) the treatises of two late fifteenth century English Alchemists, George Ripley, whose *Compound* and other pieces were printed in London, 1591 (*DNB.*), and Thomas Norton, whose *Ordinall of Alchimy* was printed, in Latin, in 1618, in German in 1625 (*DNB.*), and in English in 1652 in Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*; (3) treatises belonging to the Paracelsan alchemical corpus as trans. from the Geneva, 1658, edition of Paracelsus' *Opera* by A. E. Waite (*Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, 2 vols., London, 1894); (4) several late sixteenth and early seventeenth century treatises found in Elias Ashmole's collection, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652), and in the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, published by Lucas Jennis at Frankfort, 1625, (as trans. by A. E. Waite in the *Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged*, 2 vols., London, 1893). (I have used the Huntington Library Copies of the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* and the *Mirror of Alkimy*.)

[3] This is the preachment of the fourteenth book of Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (first ed., 1584). It is the purport of the slight and comic alchemic underplot in Lyly's *Gallathea*, of the numerous satiric references to alchemy in the writings of Greene, Nash, Breton, Lodge, Hall, and Rowlands. It is the underlying assumption of the satire in Jonson's *Alchemist* and *Mercury Vindicated*

Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this
All honor's mimique; all wealth alchimie.[4]

In another poem of the "Songs and Sonets" group, *Loves Alchymie*, the whole indictment of the science is implied:

Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne then I,
Say, where this centrique happiness doth lie:
I have lov'd, and got, and told,
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
I should not finde that hidden mysterie;
Oh, 'tis imposture all:
And as no chymique yet the'Elixir got,
But glorifies his pregnant pot,
If by the way to him befall
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall,
So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,
But get a winter-seeming summers night.[5]

The poet's repeated efforts to discover the "centrique happiness" of love are here compared to the repeated rounds of experiments through which an alchemist goes in his efforts to discover the philosopher's stone. The loving, getting, and telling of the searcher for the inner mystery of love correspond to the sublimations, coagulation, multiplications, and the like, of the alchemist. Neither searcher ever really secures the object of his search. And the lover, like the alchemist, must content himself with a substitute; both are self-gulled. The opening lines of the second stanza tacitly continue the comparison with a thought that reminds one of the Cannon's Yeoman's diatribe against alchemy:

from the Alchemists. The conception is to be readily seen in earlier writers whose influence on the Elizabethans is undisputed—in Cornelius Agrippa's chapter of mingled sarcasm, condemnation, and praise for alchemy in *De incertitudine et vanitate scientium et artium* (an English trans, of which was pub. in 1569; sec. ed., 1575), in the two alchemic dialogues of Erasmus: *Alcumistica* and πτωχολογια. It is an informing idea behind Chaucer's *Canon Yeoman's Tale*. (For discussion of the popular tradition of alchemic satire, see Lothar Nowak, *Alchemie u. Alchemisten in der Eng. Lit.* [Breslau, 1934], the introduction to C. M. Hathaway's edition of Jonson's *Alchemist* [New York, 1903], and chapter three of my unpubl. dissertation [Vanderbilt], *Alchemy in the Writings of Chaucer, Jonson, and Donne*.)

[4] H. J. C. Grierson, editor, *The Poems of John Donne* (2 vols., Oxford, 1912) 1. 11. vv. 23-4. (Referred to hereafter as *Poems* when citing the text of Vol. 1, as Grierson, *op. cit.* when citing the commentary, Vol. 2.)

[5] *Poems* I. 39. vv. 1-2.

Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,
Shall we, for this vaine Bubles shadow pay?

The poem speaks no more of alchemy, but enough has been said to make good the similarity between the lover's and the "philosopher's" quest, and so to justify the title.

Donne's writing that the "chymique . . . glorifies his *pregnant* pot" recalls the common alchemical analogy between the preparation of the stone and human generation,[6] while the next two lines,

If by the way to him befall
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall,

echoes the close connection between alchemy and medicine insisted upon by Paracelsus.[7] Cornelius Agrippa dwells satirically upon such substitute activities of alchemists:

But with some experimētes of Physicke, with Ceruse, with redde painting, with *Stibium*, & with Sope & such like paintings, women-like colours and smeering of olde ruines and such as the holy Scripture termeth whoorish ointments, they gather up monie to furnish their shoppe of *Alcumie*, where of it is finally growen to a Prouerbe: every *Alcumist* is a Phisition or a Sope maker.[8]

The figure of an alchemist's contenting himself with lesser findings when the main object of his search eludes him Donne uses again, in a letter to Sir Henry Goodyere:

My Lord Chancellor gave me so noble and so ready a dispatch, accompanied with so fatherly advice that I am now, like an

[6] As, for example, in Ripley's *Mistery of Alchemists* and in Sir Edward Kelle's *Work*, both of which are printed in Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), pp. 381 ff. and 324 ff. There is another reference to the same analogy in *Infinitati Sacrum, The Progresse of the Soule:*

Adam and *Eve* had mingled bloods, and now
Like Chimiques equall fires, her temperate wombe
Had stew'd and form'd it (*Poems* 1. 315. vv. 493-495).

[7] For example, in *Alchemy, the Third Column of Medicine* (*Hermetic and Alchemic Writings of . . . Paracelsus* [ed. A. E. Waite] 2. 151-152).

[8] *Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*, Englished by Ja[mes] San[ford], Gent. (Second edition, 1575), f. 157^{v}. Lodge's verse adaptation of Agrippa's remarks on alchemy (in *A Fig for Momus*, 1595) carries this idea almost to the time of Donne's writing his poem. Lodge's version of this part begins:

Yet these quack-salvers for a colour sake
Pretend some physical experiments . . . (Hunterian Club Edition, 1883)

alchemist, delighted with discoveries by the way, though I attain not mine end.[9]

Alchemists, according to the popular satiric opinion, were often self-deceivers. Such a thought is to be found in Elegie II, *The Bracelet*:

> Or were it such gold as that wherewithall
> Almighty *Chymiques* from each minerall,
> Having by some subtle fire a soul out-pull'd;
> Are dirtely and desperately gulled . . .[10]

Again, they were deliberate cheaters, preying on the gullibilities of mankind. It is to the second type that reference is made when, in *The Crosse*, the contention that pride "may issue from humility" is enforced with the simile:

> But, as oft Alchimists doe coyners prove,
> So may a selfe-dispising, get selfe-love.[11]

Authority for such a charge against alchemists is not hard to find, even among their own brethren. For example, in the *Aurora of Philosophers* we find:

Now the sophists have mixed this counterfeit Venus with twice its weight of Luna, and sold it to the gold-smiths and mint-masters, until at last they have transmuted themselves into false coiners—not only those who sold but those who bought it.[12]

2

Each of these figures achieves its author's purpose, it is clear, by intimating an opinion of alchemy identifiable with the

[9] Quoted by Grierson, *op. cit.*, 2. 36, from Sir Edmund Goose's *Life and Letters of John Donne* 2. 49.

[10] *Poems* 1. 97. vv. 43-46.

[11] *Poems* 1. 332.

[12] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 58. *Cf.* Agrippa's *Vanitie*, f. 158^r, where the reference is to the alchemists' victims: ". . . and they that in their youth have despised to live in a meane estate, subject all their life time to the deceytes of Alcumistes, being nowe waxen olde men, are compelled to begge in great pouertie, and beeing in so great calamitie, in steade of favour and mercie they receyue contempt and scorne, oftentimes constrained thorowe pouertie to degenerate to naughtie Artes: to counterfeyt money, and other falsifications." And Lodge's version:

> In briefe, when other subtile shifts doe faile,
> They fall to coyning, & from thence by course
> Through hempen windowes learne to shake their taile.
>
> (*A Fig for Momus*, Hunterian Club Edition, 1883).

popular tradition of alchemical satire.[13] The opinion thus becomes the keynote of the figure. The case is quite different with those figures which make use of particulars of alchemical theory or practice, where the alchemical concepts serve to express outright as metaphors or to intensify as similes the thought-content of the lines. In each of these instances the value of the concept for Donne lies in its aptness for illustrating, explaining, or intensifying the idea which it embodies or to which it is juxtaposed. The ultimate, or even the apparent, truth or falsity of the concept is not of immediate moment in his purpose. Sufficient is the fact that the concept exists as an accepted part of the mass of beliefs known as alchemy and that it can be fairly transferred from its logical connection with that science to body forth or explain a concept in another realm of thought or knowledge which is the poet's subject.

It is to these uses of alchemy that we now direct our attention, and first to those figures making use of the qualities and attributes of and alchemical theories concerning gold. At times the reference is merely to a physical property of gold, as

> Gold being the heaviest metal amongst all,
> May my most heavy curse upon thee fall.[14]

Later in the same poem the figure is an application of the supposed medicinal properties of so-called "potable gold" to the golden bracelet of his mistress, which the poet has had the misfortune of losing. Donne is apostrophizing the hypothetical finder of the bauble:

> But I forgive; repent thee honest man;
> Gold is restorative, restore it then:
> But if from it thou beest loath to depart,
> Because 'tis cordiall, would twere at thy heart.[15]

Belief in the healing virtues of certain preparations of gold was, of course, a common part, of the mediaeval doctor's bundle of theories. Chaucer's "Doctour of Phisik," it will be remembered, was especially fond of such treatment. Translations and adap-

[13] Whether or not these figures express Donne's own opinion is, of course, another problem, one I hope to investigate at another time.

[14] "The Bracelet," *Poems* 1. 99. vv. 93-94.

[15] *Poems* 1. 100. vv. 111-114.

tations of John of Rupecissa's treatise on the fifth essence, such as *The Book of Quinte Essence*, devote considerable space to medicine in which gold is an ingredient and show the popularity of such cures in the fifteenth century.[16] Paracelsus, with his insistence upon the importance of chemic medicine, was a firm believer in the curative efficacy of gold. For example, in his treatise *Concerning Preparations in Alchemical Medicine* no less than eight prescriptions in which gold is an important item are given, and it is declared that "the virtues of Gold obtain in Paralysis, Synthena, Fevers, Palpitation of the Heart, Complaints of the Matrix, Ethica, Peri-pneumonia, and in acute diseases, generally."[17] In another work Paracelsus affirms that potable gold is a tonic for the heart so efficacious that it prevents all injury befalling that organ.[18] It is the connection between medicinal gold and the heart (Latin, *cor, cordis*) which Donne calls to mind in the lines quoted above, before he immediately wrenches the thought back to the bracelet or chain, the subject of the poem and antecedent of "it," which "would twere at thy heart."[19]

In two other poems Donne uses figures based on the physical properties of gold as understood by the alchemist. Elegie XVIII, *Loves Progress*, one of the most salaciously sensuous of the "Songs and Sonnets," develops the theme:

> Perfection is in unitie: preferr
> One woman first, and then one thing in her.

A figure compares this advised attitude toward woman with the poet's attitude toward gold:

> I, when I value gold, may think upon
> The ductilnes, the application,
> The wholsomness, the ingenuitie,
> From rust, from soil, from fire ever free:
> But if I love it, 'tis because 'tis made
> By our new nature (Use) the soul of trade.[20]

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[16] *EETS.* 16, pp. 15 ff.

[17] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 2. 225.

[18] *Ibid.* 2. 29, note.

[19] Earlier in the poem Donne had introduced the same metaphor of the bracelet as serving for a fetter or chain to punish the offender:

> Here fetter'd, manacled, and hang'd in chains,
> First mayst thou bee; then chaind to hellish paines (vv. 94-95).

[20] *Poems* 1. 116. vv. 11-16.

Again in one of the "Letters to Severall Personages" addressed *To the Lady Bedford*, commiserating with her on the death of a friend, Donne writes:

> Shee was all spices, you all metalls; so
> In you two wee did both rich Indies know.
> And as no fire, nor rust can spend or waste
> One dramme of gold, but what was first shall last,
> Though it bee forc'd in water, earth, salt, aire,
> Expans'd in infinite, none will impaire;
> So, to yourself you may additions take,
> But nothing can you lesse, or changed make.[21]

Vincent of Beauvais' statement of the physical properties of gold, which he gives on the authority of the Arabian alchemist, Rhazes, offers parallels to some of the ideas expressed in these lines:

> Gold is hot and moist, more noble than all other bodies, and their king and master. It is corrupted neither by earth, water, aire, nor fire; nor is it diminished in the fire; but the fire rectifies and moistens it. Nor do the sulphurs which burn up other bodies consume it; for its nature and complexion are just, equal, and clear, since in it the four natures [elements] are complete and balanced, so that there is in it neither addition nor diminution.[22]

Paracelsus says that gold is "the most beautiful metal of our acquaintance, the best that nature can produce, as perfect as it is unalterable in itself."[23] And again:

> It remains constantly and fixed in the fire, nor does it fly therefrom, nor is it consumed by it, but rather by its agency it becomes clearer, purer and more beautiful. Nothing either hot or cold can injure it, or any other accident.[24]

The perfection which mediaeval and renaissance alchemists ascribed to gold they explained, as the above quotations indicate, on the basis of the perfect balance and equality of the elements of which they considered it to be made up. So Artephius, in a long passage in his *Liber qui Clavis Maioris*

[21] *Poems* 1. 228. vv. 33-40.

[22] *Speculum Naturale*, Lib. 8, Cap. 13. There is a passage quite similar to this in John Dastin's *Rosarium*, printed in J. J. Manget's *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* (Geneva, 1702) 2. 311.

[23] Paracelsus *op. cit.* 1. 301.

[24] *Ibid.* 1. 75-76.

Sapientiae dicitur, describes how fire is tempered by water, in equal amounts, and the mixture tempered equally with earth and air to generate the "*corpus aequale quod Sol* [i. e. gold] *est*." [25] And Ficino's *Liber de Arte Chemica* considers at length the "temperantia" of gold.[26] There is, of course, a close analogy between this idea and the medical concept of perfect health as being the result of a just balance of the humors in the human body. It is probably to the latter belief that Donne is referring when he writes in *The Progresse of the Soule. The Second Anniversary:*

> Shee whose complexion was so even made,
> That which of her Ingredients should invade
> The other three, no Feare, no Art could guesse:
> So far were all remov'd from more, or lesse.[27]

Later on in the same poem gold, the perfect metal, serves as a similitude for Elizabeth Drewry's soul. The thought here, however, is of the metal itself without any consideration of the analogy with perfection in balance of elements in the human frame. The soul is considered as a separate and more perfect entity than the body:

> She, of whose soule, if we may say, 'twas Golde,
> Her body was th' Electrum, and did hold
> Many degrees of that . . .[28]

Although electrum is used by alchemical writers with many different meanings, the commonest signification, perhaps, and the one obviously intended here is that of an alloy between gold and a baser metal, usually silver. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, for example, describes "three manners of kinds" of electrum of which the "third manner is made of three parts of gold and of

[25] In Manget, *op. cit.* 1. 504.

[26] *Ibid.* 2. 177.

[27] *Poems* 1. 254. vv. 123-126; *cf.* Grierson's note, 2. 197.

[28] *Poems* 1. 256. vv. 241-243. *Cf.* the following from *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*: "If I will aske meere Philosophers, what the soule is, I shall finde amongst them, that will tell me, it is nothing, but the *temperament* and *harmony*, and *just and equall composition of the Elements in the body*, which produces all those *faculties* which we ascribe to the *soule*; and so, in it selfe is nothing, no *seperable substance*, that overlives the *body*. They see the *soule* is nothing else in other *creatures*, and they affect an *impious humilitie*, to think as low of Man." (*Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* [ed. John Hayward, London, 1936]. pp. 539-540.)

the fourth of silver." [29] According to Bacon, as Grierson points out, the proportions were one of silver to five of gold.[30] The meaning of Donne's lines is, then, that Elizabeth Drewry's body partakes only in part of the perfection of her soul.

In the *Ecclogue, 1613. December 26*, introductory to Donne's epithalamion on the marriage of Lady Frances Howard and the Earl of Somerset, use is made of an alchemical doctrine regarding the natural generation of gold. *Allophanes* is represented as rebuking *Idios* for absenting himself from Court when such great events are toward. Idios' defense of his action is that even in retirement he is not completely outside the periphery of the Court's influence. But Allophanes urges the advantages of a closer contact, employing, among other figures equally foreign to the generality of Elizabethan pastoral poetry, this one:

> The earth doth in her inward bowels hold
> Stuffe well dispos'd, and which would faine be gold,
> But never shall except it chance to lye,
> So upward, that heaven gild it with his eye;
> As, for divine things faith comes from above,
> So for best civil use all tinctures move
> From higher powers; from God religion springs,
> Wisdom, and honour from the use of kings.[31]

The belief that the rays of the sun have a direct influence in turning " stuff well dispos'd " into gold is a natural development of the common and time-honoured alchemical practice of associating each metal with a particular planet. The general concept of planetary influence is thus expressed by Thomas Norton:

> For cause efficient of Metalls finde ye shall
> Only to be the vertue Minerall,
> Which in everie Erth is not found,
> But in certaine places of eligible ground;
> Into which places the Heavenly Spheare,
> Sendeth his beames directly everie yeare.
> And as the matters there disposed be
> Such metalls thereof formed shall you see.[32]

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[29] *Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus* (ed. R. Steele, London, 1924), p. 38.

[30] Grierson, *op. cit.* 2. 199.

[31] *Poems* 1. 133. vv. 61-68.

[32] *Ordinall of Alchemy*, in Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p. 19.

Paracelsus subscribes to the theory in his treatise *Concerning the Nature of Things*.[33] Moreover, in one of the anonymous treatises printed as a part of the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, entitled *The Glory of the World*, there is a full statement of the theory and one with which Donne's expression of the idea quite closely agrees. The author has been describing the generation of metals in accordance with the Aristotelian theory of the condensation of sulphur and mercury vapors among the stones within the mountains of the earth. He continues:

> The grosser the stones and the earth of the mountaine are, the less pure will the metal be; the more subtle the soil and the stones are, the more subtle will be the vapour, and the sulphur and mercury formed by its condensation . . . and the purer these latter are, the purer, of course, will the metals themselves be. . . . Hence arise the different metals, each after its own kind. For as each tree of the field has its own peculiar shape, appearance, and fruit, so each mountain bears its own particular ore; those stones and that earth being the soil in which metals grow. The quality of this soil is to a great extent dependent upon planetary influences. The nearer the mountains lie to the planets, the more do metals grow in them: for the qualities of metals are determined by planetary influences. Mountains that are turned toward the sun have subtle stones and earth, and produce nothing but gold.[34]

According to this theory, the sun quite literally "plays the alchemist."

As Donne applies the figure, the king becomes the alchemist-playing sun. The country, in which Idios is living in retirement, is like unto those less-favorably placed mountains in which only the baser metals may be procreated; while the denizens of the Court feel the full transmuting force of the "tinctures" of "wisdom, and honour from the use of kings."

The alchemical doctrine that nature strives always toward the perfection of gold, that in the earth base metals change gradually, over long periods of time, to gold, finds expression in another of Donne's poems, the *Epitaph on Himself:*

> . . . till us death lay
> To ripe and mellow there in the grave w'are stubborne clay,
> Parents make us earth, and soules dignifie
> Vs to be glasse, here to grow gold we lie.[35]

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[33] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 120.

[34] *The Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged* (ed. by A. E. Waite, London, 1893), 1. 195-196.

[35] *Poems* 1. 291. vv. 11-14.

3

An occasional figure seems to depend on some knowledge of alchemical apparatus and of practical laboratory operations. For example, in one of the verse epistles to the Countess of Bedford Donne enforces the idea that " from low persons doth all honour flow " by an analogy to distilling operations which shows his familiarity with the common methods of applying heat to the distilling vessel:

> For when from herbs the pure part must be wonne
> From grasse, by Stilling, this is better done
> By despis'd dung, then by the fire or Sunne.[36]

In *Infinitati Sacrum: The Progress of the Soule*, the hypothetical breathing arrangements of a fish in which the progressing soul lingers for a time are compared to the workings of distillation apparatus.

> And whether she leape up sometimes to breath
> And sucke in aire, or find it underneath,
> Or working parts like mills or limbecks hath
> To make the water thinne, and airelike . . .[37]

Again in *An Anatomy of the World: The Frst Anniversary* the whole distilling process is described in a phrase:

> disposed into lesse glasse
> Spirits of vertue, which then scatter'd was.[38]

When writing this line and a half, one feels, Donne had the entire operation clearly in his mind's eye; and if in his mind's eye, it must formerly have been, more than once, before his body's eye. There is the large-bowled alembic, sitting over some sort of slow fire, with the long glass beak, or " crow's bill," passing from its top to the smaller receiving vessel. As one watches, the liquid in the larger vessel is gradually vaporized, and the vapor passes into the cooler region of the beak, where it recondenses and drops slowly into the " lesse glasse."

The same poem employs another image which would scarcely

[36] *Poems* 1. 218. vv. 10-12.
[37] *Poems* 1. 305-306. vv. 264-268.
[38] *Poems* 1. 235. vv. 149-150.

have occurred to Donne had he not observed, or performed the operation on which it is based:

> As gold falls sicke being stung with Mercury
> All the worlds parts of such complexion bee.[39]

The figure is describing the effect on the sensible world of the death of Elizabeth Drewry. Only one who had witnessed the sudden whitening effect when a bit of quicksilver is rubbed on a piece of wrought or stamped gold—a coin, for example—every marking, every outline as distinct as before, but all covered with a ghostly, silvery luminosity, could have realized the force and decorum of such an image.

These figures appear to be the result of observation and, perhaps, some personal experience in a laboratory. The majority of Donne's alchemical images, however, are based on the theoretical rather than the experimental or practical side of the science. Before we go on to examine more of these, we may look at one elaborate figure, which, if it is alchemical, is the single example of Donne's employment, in an alchemical image, of the esoteric and fanciful language in which many of the treatises are couched.

Of the many fanciful terms employed by alchemists not a few were borrowings from the realm of natural history as it is reported (or rather distorted) in the marvel-studded medieval bestiaries. Now Donne was not averse to curious lore of the bestiary sort and called upon it frequently for picturesque metaphors. It is difficult to determine, in the case of one figure of this sort employed in *The Canonization*, whether the reference intended is immeditately to the field of natural history or whether Donne is using the terms with their alchemical signification. The last six lines of the following stanza contain the matter in dispute:

> Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
> Call her one, mee another flye,
> We're tapers too; and at our owne cost die,
> And wee in us finde the' Eagle and the Dove.
> The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
> By us, we two being one, are it.

---

[39] *Poems* 1. 241. vv. 345-346.

So to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.[40]

The symbolism of the first three lines is patent. There is, however, so far as I know, neither in nature nor in the "unnatural natural history" of the bestiaries any connection between the eagle and the dove. The former, like the phoenix, was capable, according to *Physiologus*, of renewing its youth, though not, as in the case of the phoenix, by means of an intermediate fiery death.[41] The dove is, of course, the symbol of faithful love; and that may be all Donne intended by its inclusion here. However, there is a passage in Paracelsus' *Treasure of Treasures* which couples the eagle and the phoenix together, brings in also the color which the dove represents in alchemy, and suggests that Donne may have had an alchemical idea in mind when employing these symbols. The passage is concerned with the preparation of the "Tincture of the Alchemists," or philosopher's stone:

> This work, the Tincture of the Alchemists, need not be one of nine months; but quickly and without any delay you may go on by the Spagyric Art of the Alchemists, and in the space of forty days, you can fix this alchemical substance, exalt it, putrefy it, ferment it, coagulate it into a stone, and produce the Alchemical Phoenix. But it should be noted well that the Sulphur of Cinnabar becomes the Flying Eagle, whose wings fly away without wind, and carry the body of the Phoenix to the nest of the parent, where it is nourished by the element of fire, and the young ones dig out its eyes: from whence there emerges a whiteness, divided in its sphere, into a sphere and life out of its own heart, by the balsam of its inward parts . . .[42]

In this bizarre account the philosopher's stone, as is frequently the case, is symbolized by the phoenix, which must be consumed by fire in order to renew itself.[43] Important subservient opera-

[40] *Poems* 1. 15. vv. 19-27. Grierson's notes attempt no elucidation of the figure.

[41] *Physiologus* (trans. by James Carlill), in *The Epic of the Beast* (ed. Wm. Rose, London, *n. d.*), pp. 209-210, 217-219, 222-225. *Cf.* also *Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus*, pp. 118-126.

[42] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 40.

[43] For other examples of a similar symbolic use of the phoenix, *cf.* John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry* (London, 1936), pp. 84, 167, 199, etc.; also Lynn Thorndike,

tions, or substances preliminarily formed in the process, are referred to as the "flying eagle"[44] and as an emerging whiteness. Philalethes and other alchemists gave this whiteness, or white stage of the work, the designation of "dove," "Diana's doves."[45]

If we are willing to accept an alchemical explanation of Donne's central figure, the meaning of the stanza is clear. The first three lines depict the destructive power of mutual love by the familiar analogy of moths that lose their lives by flying into burning tapers and, again, by the self-consumption of the tapers themselves. Then the regenerative force of love is bodied forth in the figure of the alchemical eagle and dove which are instrumental in the alchemical phoenix's rise, new-born, from the fire. The mystical unity of the pair of lovers is emphasized by the common sex of the phoenix;[46] and the point of the stanza is reiterated in the closing lines:

> Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
> Mysterious by this love.[47]

4

Several of Donne's alchemical figures concern themselves with the powers of transmuting elixirs and with the process of transmutation. The elixir may serve as an analogy to an abstract

History of Magic and Experimental Science (New York, 1934), 3. 637; *The Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged* 2. 115.

[44] *Cf.* Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 103, 218, etc.; and Ripley's "Bird of Hermes," *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p. 377.

[45] Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 138, 160. The whole scheme is an application of the "color sequence," which is an important part of the theoretical discussion in most alchemical treatises. *Cf.*, for example, the sixth chapter of the *Speculum Alchemiae*: "De coloribus accidentalibus and essentialibus in opere apparentibus" (in J. J. Manget's *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* 1. 615).

[46] *Cf. The Extasie*, vv. 33-36:

> . . . as all severall soules containe
> Mixture of things, they know not what,
> Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe again,
> And makes both one, each this and that.

[47] If my reading of this stanza is the correct one, the comma at the end of v. 25 in Grierson's edition, which he adopted on the authority of three MSS., should probably be re-exchanged for the period of the early printed editions. *Cf.* Grierson's note, *op. cit.* 2. 15-16. George Williamson, "Textual Difficulties in Donne's Poetry," *MP* 38 (1940). 45-46, favors this punctuation after a brilliant analysis of the meaning of the poem.

quality or virtue which, as the former has the power of transmuting baser metals to gold, can ennoble and purify frail, negative human characteristics to positive good. Such is its use in the following sentence from *Paradoxes and Problemes:*

> For allow a man to be *discreet* and *flexible* to complaints, which are great *vertuous* gifts of the *minde*, this *discretion* will be to him the *soule* and *Elixir* of all vertues, so that touched with this, even *pride* shall be made *humility*; and *Cowardice*, honourable and wise *valour*.[48]

In a figure in the verse letter *To the Countesse of Huntingdon* [49] virtue itself is likened to gold so refined that it may serve as the elixir. The same figure utilizes the distinction between mere gilding or coloring and true transmutation. Virtue, so the argument of the poem runs, has always found its natural repository in man, for, according to the biblical account of the creation, man alone was given a soul. Woman has, at best, been occasionally distinguished by a " milde innocence." But now conditions are different. The Countess, a miraculous new star in the universe, gleams with " active good," and Virtue, " exil'd by men," has now concentrated her strength in this one perfect woman. A comparison of the different manners in which men and this woman have received Virtue gives occasion for the alchemical figure:

> She guilded us; But you are gold, and Shee;
> Us she informed, but transubstantiates you;
> Soft dispositions which ductile bee,
> Elixarlike, she makes not cleane, but new (vv. 25-28).

Men had received virtue as a temporary and sophistical tincture which changes the appearance without changing the nature of the metal upon which it is projected. For, though " informed " by the spirit or tincture of virtue, they have been able to " exile " it from themselves. The Countess, on the other hand, has had her whole substance transmuted into the perfect metal of which the elixir is composed.

Donne's description of the true transmutation is alchemically exact, as may be observed by comparing it with Paracelsus'

[48] *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (ed. Hayward), p. 346.

[49] *Poems* 1. 201-203. The astronomical figures in which the poem abounds are discussed by Coffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-145.

consideration of the elixir of gold in his *Book Concerning Long Life*.[50] "Of all elixirs," he there says, "the highest and most potent is that of gold." Following directions for preparing this elixir, we learn that "it corrects and purifies everything that is not pure," preserves the body and renders it free from all change or corruption. Lastly, we are told that when the body has been changed into the stuff of the elixir, it retains its same outward form. So Donne could say of the Countess that while virtue had transmuted her into itself, she still maintained her wonted relationships toward humankind:

> Though you a wifes and mothers name retaine,
> 'Tis not as woman, for all are not soe,
> But vertue having made you vertue, 'is faine
> T'adhere in these names, her and you to show . . .
> So, for our sakes you do low names abide (vv. 29-33, 36).

The fact that men had not been, as was the Countess, completely transformed by the elixir of virtue was due to no fault of the elixir but to weaknesses in the men themselves. They did not posses in sufficient quantity that "active good" which rendered the lady the one perfect subject for such transmutation. This idea, that weaknesses or imperfections in the body upon which projection is made prevent complete transmutation, Donne employs again in a figure in *An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary*. Here the transmuting elixir is not an abstract quality, such as virtue, but the benign and ennobling influence of the life and character of the young Elizabeth Drewry. The effect of this elixir on the body upon which it is projected—the generality of mankind in society—is thus described by Donne:

> She, from whose influence all Impressions came,
> But, by Receivers impotences, lame,
> Who, though she could not transubstantiate
> All states to gold, yet guilded every state,
> So that some Princes have some temperance;
> Some Counsellors some purpose to advance
> The common profit; and some people have
> Some state, no more than Kings should give, to crave;
> Some women have some taciturnity,
> Some nunneries some graines of chastitie.

[50] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 2. 333-334.

> She that did this much, and much more could doe,
> But that our age was Iron, and rustie too,
> Shee, shee is dead . . .[51]

In both cases the point of the figure turns upon the assumption that complete transmutation depends upon the purity of the body and its aptitude to receive projection as well as upon the power of the transmuting elixir. Such an assumption is implicit in the *Summa Perfectionis* of Geber, where considerable attention is given to the cleansing and preparation of metals upon which projection is made.[52] The author of the *Speculum Alchemicae* contents himself with advising that projection be made upon metals as near as possible to perfection, since these are reduced to perfection "more easily, more quickly, and better, and more perfectly, than those far remote."[53] And he goes on to say that he who has diligently read his preceding chapters will know upon what body to make projection—an obvious reference to the earlier chapter in which the procreation of the metals had been described in an inverse order to the degree of impurity of the sulphur and mercury of which they were said to be composed: gold, silver, tin, lead, copper, and iron.[54] Here is alchemical authority, then, for Donne's figures, and specifically for the couplet:

> She that did this much, and much more could doe,
> But that our age was Iron, and rustie too . . .

Paracelsus may stand, as well, for authority in these matters. For in his short work *Concerning the Transmutations of Metals and Cements*,[55] after stating that the purpose of the treatise

[51] *Poems* 1. 243-244. vv. 415-427.

[52] Geber devotes several chapters to the "peculiar Preparation" of each of the imperfect bodies, prior to their being used as the recipients of projection (*The Works of Geber*, ed. E. J. Holmyard [London, 1928], pp. 148-158).

[53] "Sciendum est, quod unum metallum magis est remotu[m] a perfectione quam aliud: Et aliud propinquius alio, & vicinius. Et quamvis quodlibet metallum per Elixir ad perfectionem reducatur, tamen levius, citius, & melius, & perfectius propinqua recuduntur, quam multum remota" (*Speculum Alchemiae*, Cap. 7, in Manget's *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* 1. 616).

[54] *Speculum Alchemiae*, Cap. 2. Earlier in the same poem (vv. 147-148) there is a passing reference to the gradation of metals, when the remark is made that the small stature of modern man, in comparison with the supposed giant size of their ancient forefathers, were a matter "light" to contemplate, "had we chang'd to gold Their silver." These ideas have, of course, obvious primitivistic implications.

[55] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 41-47.

is to teach "how metals may be cemented [i. e. transmuted] into the chief metal gold, that is, Sol," he makes the point that "notice should be taken what are the bodies which confer their own concordance as though belonging to the same species. For there are some bodies which are receptive and others which are not so." Later in the treatise he describes a "third cement" which "is adapted for perfecting the other metals and rendering them fit in themselves for the tincture of the other cements. For where a metal has not been prepared and smeared over for this tincture it is not able to take it, or only in a very slight degree, and by a dangerous process." And since he recognized the humble state of iron in the scale of metals and the consequent difficulty of its transmutation, he advised that an elixir (or, as he calls it here, cement) designed to transmute Saturn (lead) would have to be used in greater quantities in order to transmute iron, a lower metal. "If, however," he says, "you have selected other metals, such as Venus (copper) or Mars (iron), add more of the powder and more heat, that they may be able to mix and be brought to a state of transmutation."

The act of transmutation, as it was conceived of in alchemical theorizings was a purifying operation. Its aim was to change the low and imperfect metals into the nature of the higher and purer ones—silver and gold. In achieving this purpose an alchemist would have to purge the bad qualities as well as supplement and strengthen the good. So both Geber and Paracelsus, to cite them as examples, spend considerable space and effort in their directions for removing the adhering but not essential impurities of the metals to be transmuted prior to the projection of the medicine, or elixir, which is designed to make up deficiences. This concept of alchemy as purification is at the bottom of another alchemical figure in Donne's first extravaganza eulogizing Elizabeth Drewry. The maiden's mind was full of such pure virtue, he says, that it could ally itself to a body of the weaker sex and cleanse that of its natural imperfections:

> Shee in whom vertue was so much refin'd
> That for Allay unto so pure a minde
> Shee took the weaker Sex; shee that could drive

> The poysonous tincture, and the stain of Eve . . .[56]
> Out of her thoughts, and deeds; and purifie
> All, by a true religious Alchymie;
> Shee, shee is dead.[57]

In one of his religious poems Donne employs the same figure in a different setting. The first stanza of *The Litanie*, addressed to the Father, beseeches him to:

> purge away
> All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned
> I may rise up from death, before I'm dead.[58]

A particularly effective use of the transmutation idea—effective because of the precision with which the matter of the image sets forth the subject-content of the lines—is the following from *Resurrection, imperfect*. The poem concerns the resurrection of Christ,

> Whose body having walk'd on earth, and now
> Hasting to Heaven, would, that he might allow
> Himselfe unto all stations, and fill all,

---

[56] Cf. the following from a fragment attributed by Ashmole to "Pearce, the Black Monke":

> Wyth thys Water Mercuriall,
> We wasch the fylth Originall
> Of our Erth tyll yt be whyte . . .
> (*Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p. 429.)

[57] *Poems* 1. 236-237. vv. 177-183.

[58] *Poems* 1. 338. vv. 7-9. Other figures based on the purging of noisome or unnecessary qualities belong rather to the realm of chemic medicine than to that of pure alchemy. The theories underlying the two were, of course, the same, but the subjects were different; the former sought to cure human ills by applying the principles which, it was believed, enabled alchemists to cure the imperfections of metals.

A figure in one of the verse letters to Sir Henry Wotton contrasts the Galenist and Paracelsian methods of treatment:

> Only in this one thing, be no Galenist: to make
> Courts hot ambitions wholesome, do not take
> A dramme of Countries dulnesse; do not adde
> Correctives, but as chymiques, purge the bad
> (*Poems* 1. 182. vv. 59-62.)

Donne had chemic medicine in mind when he wrote the following in *The Crosse*:

> Materiall Crosses, then, good physick bee,
> But yet spirituall have chiefe dignity.
> These for extracted chimique medicine serve,
> And cure much better, and as well preserve;
> Then are you your own physicke, or need none,
> When still'd, or purg'd by tribulation (*Poems* 1. 332. vv. 25-30.)

For these three daies become a minerall;
He was all gold when he lay downe, but rose
All tincture, and doth not alone dispose
Leaden and iron wills to good, but is
Of power to make even sinful flesh like his.[59]

The biblical teaching that death is a necessary preliminary to regeneration was adopted into alchemical theory and, on the basis of analogy to vegetable life, made the foundation of hypotheses regarding the natural generation as well as the artificial transmutation of metals. Dying, or as the alchemists oftener expressed it, mortification, corruption, or putrefaction, was thought to reduce to first elements and so prepare the way for new and better generation.[60] The saying that "the corruption of one thing is the generation of another" is an alchemical proverb. In the present figure Donne uses the alchemical adaptation of this idea to illustrate and enforce one instance of the application of the idea in biblical and theological realms. He expounds the death and resurrection of Christ in terms of the alchemical death and resurrection of gold.

Dying is a necessary preliminary to alchemical revivification, a dying which reduces to original elements. Donne's line "For these three daies become a minerall" shows his awareness of this doctrine. Paracelsus, in his tract on the *Economy of Minerals*, treats of a kind of minerals which are not the common ones of our acquaintance but an elementary sort, "containing in themselves all minerals, metals, gems, salts, and other things of that kind, like different seeds in a bag."[61] In other words, these minerals are only another rationalization (like philosopher's sulphur and mercury) of the "remote matter" whence common minerals and metals spring. It is this sort of mineral, I take it, that Donne had in mind when he wrote "For these three daies become a minerall." In one line he has thus expressed the two parts of the condition necessary to alchemical revivification: dying, or mortification, and reduction to primal matter.

[59] *Poems* 1. 334. vv. 9-16.

[60] "Nunc potes cognoscere, quod nulla res mundi naturaliter potest nasci nec crescere, nec animari, nisi post suam corruptionem & putrefactionem & mortificationem, quia tunc natura in naturam mutatur." Raymundi Lulli *Vade Mecum, Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* 1. 849. *Cf.* also Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 120.

[61] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 95.

The Christ, in the fleshly body " all gold," has arisen from death "All tincture." The assumption on which the figure is based is that gold can by the " mortification-regeneration " process be refined into a tincture or elixir which has the power of transmuting baser metals to gold. This assumption is sound alchemical doctrine, as Michael Sendivogius attests in *The New Chemical Light:*

> I now go on to speak about the method of preparing the Philosopher's Stone. (The Stone or Tincture) is nothing other than gold digested to the highest degree. *Common* gold resembles a plant without seed; but when such a plant is matured, it produces seed . . . and so, when gold is ripened, it produces its seed, or the Tincture.[62]

Paracelsus attests the same doctrine and in one passage explains it by analogy to mortal death and immortal bodily regeneration—just as Donne enforces the idea of death and resurrection by the alchemical image—so that Donne's figure is, essentially, the obverse to that of Paracelsus:

> But the regeneration and renovation of metals takes places thus: As man can return to the womb of his mother, that is, to the earth from which the first man sprang, and thus can be born again anew at the last day, so also all metals can return to quick mercury, can become Mercury, and be regenerated and clarified by fire, if they remain for forty weeks in perpetual heat, like a child in its mother's womb. Now they are born, however, not as common metals, but as metals which tinge: for if, as has been said, Luna is regenerated, it will afterward tinge all metals to Luna. So gold tinges other metals to Sol . . .[63]

Gold so refined " tinges other metals to Sol," says Paracelsus. And Donne completes his figure with the declaration that the tincture which is the risen Christ " disposes to good " wills of lead and iron (metals low in the scale of perfection) and transmutes even " sinful flesh " to gold.

Donne employs this elaborate figure in another poem, but in a situation to which it is less well adapted. Indeed, the *Elegie on the Lady Marckham,* a panegyric on a friend of his

[62] *Hermetic Museum* 2. 99. We have observed Donne's use of this idea in a figure in *To the Countesse of Huntingdon.* Ante, p. 272.

[63] Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 1. 126. It will be noticed that in this passage Paracelsus employs the " mercury " rationalization, rather than the " mineral " rationalization mentioned above, in describing the reduction to metallic first matter.

patroness, the Countess of Bedford, reaches its climax of exaggeration when the terms of this figure, applied with good effect to the person of the Christ in the *Resurrection*, are equated to an earthly, mortal woman. Johnson's remark concerning the *Anniversaries* eulogizing Elizabeth Drewry applies with almost equal justice to this poem: "If it had been written of the Virgin Marie," Drummond reports him as saying, "it had been something."

The figure is introduced this time by still another analogy, and there are other interesting variations from its form in *Resurrection, imperfect:*

> As men of Chine, 'after an ages stay,
> Do take up Porcelane, where they buried Clay:
> So at this grave, her limbecke, which refines
> The Diamonds, Rubies, Saphires, Pearles, and Mines,
> Of which this flesh was, her soule shall inspire
> Flesh of such stuffe, as God, when his last fire
> Annuls this world, to recompense it, shall
> Make and name then, th'Elixir of this All.[64]

The porcelain-clay analogy serves the same purpose as the main figure, to emphasize the purifying and regenerating effect of putrefaction or mortification.[65] The equation of the grave to the alchemists' distilling vessel, the alembic, which by its refining and purifying effect on the flesh makes it possible for the soul to inspire new and better flesh, is a clarifying comment on

[64] *Poems* 1. 279. vv. 21-28. It seems impossible to determine which of the two poems was written first. The Lady Marckham died in May, 1609, and the elegy was likely written the same year. Of the date of the other piece there seems to be no hint, except that its religious tone and subject seem to place it in the latter part of Donne's life, perhaps after he had taken orders. Circumstantial evidence from a comparison of the two figures is somewhat conflicting. On the one hand the greater appropriateness of the application of the image to Christ suggests that Donne used it first for this purpose and later adapted it to a less suitable subject. And we know, of course, that some of Donne's divine poems were written prior to and during the year 1609 (Grierson, *op. cit.* 2. 225-229). Again, the likening of the lady's flesh to gems rather than the more alchemically obvious gold points to a more thorough assimilation of the idea than is necessarily represented in the other figure—and hence, possibly, to a second and later rather than earlier employment of the figure. On the other hand the figure as found in the elegy makes more obvious than does that in the other poem the function assigned to the grave in the alchemical symbolism, and might thus seem to have been written first.

[65] This is one of the popular credences discussed by Sir Thomas Browne in his *Vulgar Errors* (2. 5). *Cf.* Grierson, *op. cit.* 2. 211.

the more obscure statement of the idea in *Resurrection, imperfect.*[66]

For the change from gold to gems and "mines" as the material of the flesh which is to be changed into the elixir I have found no alchemical authority, and Donne doubtless needed none. His desire to appeal to the purses of the living through the praises of the dead, if, as Grierson, fears,[67] this be the motive that actuated him—this desire, if it could prompt the use of this figure in such circumstances at all, could certainly cap the climax of poor taste by suggesting material for Lady Marckham's earthly flesh that made the gold of Christ's fade, by comparison, into insignificance. It is this flesh, the figure concludes, which, having been made the elixir by its sojourn in the alembic-grave, will at the Last Judgment transmute all earthly into heavenly flesh.

5

There is an elaborate and extremely effective use of images based on alchemical theories in one of Donne's most popular and most difficult poems, the *Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day,* where the figure is that of the making or drawing of alchemical quintessence. The term quintessence is often with alchemists another designation for the transmuting elixir or philosopher's stone. There is nothing of transmutation in this poem, however, for the figure does not concern itself with the employment of the elixir or quintessence in the transmuting of one metal into another; it deals altogether with the process of alchemical preparation of quintessence. Much of the subtlety, and, one may add, the difficulty, of the poem arises from the fact that Donne applies the terms of the figure to a situation which is the complete reverse of the alchemists's dream. Instead of the "Elixir of All" we have here the quintessence of nothingness.

The first stanza describes the physical and temporal setting and thereby sets the tone of the poem. It is December 13, the

[66] *Cf.* also another statement of the same alchemical process:

> . . . like the Chymicks masculine equall fire,
> Which in the Lymbecks warme wombe doth inspire
> Into th'earths worthless durt a soule of gold . . . (*Poems* 1. 90).

[67] Grierson, *op. cit.* 2. 209.

feast of St. Lucy, the shortest day and longest night of the year, and therefore, fittingly, " the yeares midnight." The sun shows itself only in pale flashes. Life has so retreated that all nature seems dead. But this withdrawal of life from nature is as nothing compared to the poet's state of deprivation. The second stanza opens with the poet's invitation to prospective lovers to " Study me." Then begins the alchemical figure:

> For I am every dead thing,
> In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
> For his art did expresse
> A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
> From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:
> He ruined mee, and I am re-begot
> Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.
>
> All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
> Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
> I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
> Of all, that's nothing.[68]

Love, the alchemist (says Donne), has wrought in my case a *new kind* of alchemy, one which has resulted in the preparation of the opposite substance from that which alchemists ordinarily prepare: the quintessence of nothingness instead of the quintessence of all things. And I am that quintessence of nothingness; this, has love made me.

The first two lines of the third stanza describe those quintessences of everything which are the usual preparations of alchemists:

> All others [alchemists], from all things, draw all that's good,
> Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have.

This description conforms closely to Paracelsus' description of the quintessence:

> The quintessence, then, is a certain matter extracted from all things which Nature has produced, and from everything which has life corporeally in itself, . . . and separated from all elements. . . . [T]he quintessence is, so to say, a nature, a force, a virtue, and a medicine. . . . The same is also the colour, the life, the properties of things.[69]

[68] Poems 1. 44. vv. 12-22. Geo. Williamson (*op. cit.*, pp. 49-50) gives an analysis of this poem which my study of the alchemical background tends only to confirm.

[69] Paracelsus, *The Fourth Book of the Archidoxies: Concerning the Quintessence*, *op. cit.* 2. 22.

These same two lines, by the implication of contrasts, help to make clear the state of the poet, who is " the grave " of everything that is nothing, the quintessence of nothingness, expressed or drawn by the alchemist, love, from the opposite of everything—from nothingness, privation, emptiness, absence, darkness, death. Some of the steps whereby love has accomplished this result are detailed in the remainder of the third stanza, and the climactic one is stated at the beginning of stanza four. These may not be stated in alchemical terms, but the phrase in stanza two, " He ruin'd me, and I am re-begot " (recalling the alchemical theory of putrefaction-regeneration which Donne frequently employs) and the mention of " Loves limbecke " are sufficient to maintain the alchemical setting of the figure.

Before looking at these steps of descent to quintessential nothingness, we need to consider the question of how *love* can be blamed with the poet's sad state. Here the crux of the subtlety of the poem seems to lie. The answer is, I believe, something like this: By his surrender to the power of love, the lover (i. e. the poet) has put himself into the position of being affected by the accidents of love. It is only because he loved that absence from his mistress, quarrels with her, even her death, could affect him. Because he loved, these things affected him very much; they became the determiners of his existence as a happy loving being. It is poetically just, therefore, that he attribute these accidents, which love did not cause but which the fact of his love had endowed with meaning and tragedy for him, to love itself. And it is also poetically just for the lover to identify himself with the creature, subject to the effect of these accidents, he has been made by love. So, love is the alchemist, and the accidents (to which the poet's submission to love had given the power of determining his happiness, his very being) are materials from which and by which he (the poet) has been made the quintessence of nothingness.

Here is Donne's statement of the steps by which love has accomplished this result:

> Oft a flood
> Have wee two wept, and so
> Drownd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
> To be two Chaosses, when we did show
> Care to ought else; and often absences
> Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixir grown. . . .[70]

The three figurative descriptions of episodes in the lives of the two lovers, it will be noted, depict experiences of deprivation, emptiness, absence which befell these two for whom all life had become their love.[71] They are thus, as the lover looks back on them, antecedent (but not necessarily anticipatory—for they need not have resulted in the lady's death) operations by which the alchemist love was preparing to make him the elixir of nothingness. They are accidents involving those "materials" out of which, as the poet has said, love expressed him, the elixir. The last act—the death of the lady—completed the process.

The statement in parentheses, "which word wrongs her," is an expression, I suppose, of the religious conviction that physical death is not really death at all. Admittedly, if such is its

[70] *Poems* 1. 45. vv. 22-29.

[71] For the lady, no less than the poet, has become the creature of love. The first two of these steps, those of "flood" and of "chaos," may be esoterically alchemical. Ripley's *Compound* (*Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p. 169) speaks of a flood as a situation to be avoided in the progress of the work:

But geve yt not so much that thou hyt glut,
Beware of the Dropsy, and also of *Noyes* Flood.

And the same advice is iterated in an anonymous piece printed by Ashmole:

Let him drinke noe more than will suffice,
Beware of Floods I you advise
(*Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p. 407)

The term "chaos" is used very loosely and under many significations by alchemists. Paracelsus employs it with seven or more widely differing meanings, either of two of which Donne might have had in mind here. First, he may have been thinking of the ingredients of the work when they are in the confused state of putrefaction (Paracelsus, *op. cit.* 2. 360), though this would not involve the idea of separation suggested in the figure. Perhaps it is more likely that Donne is thinking of chaos as a "generalized expression for all aerial matter," a meaning which Paracelsus often gives the word (*Ibid.* 1. 135, 205; J. M. Stillman, *The Story of Early Chemistry* [New York, 1927], p. 322). This use of the word, coupled with the idea of separation, may be illustrated from Basil Valentine's *Last Will and Testament*: "If a rectified *Aqua vitae* be lighted, then Mercury and the vegetable sulphur separateth, that Sulphur burns bright, being a meer fire, the tender Mercury betakes himself to his wings and flieth to his Chaos." (Quoted from Read, *Prelude to Chemistry*, p. 28.)

In the *Sophic Hydrolith* (*Hermetic Museum* 1. 84) there is a different application of the idea of "elixir of nothingness": "If thou strivest unduly to shorten the time thou wilt produce an abortion. Many persons have, through their ignorance, or self-opinionated haste, obtained a Nihilixir instead of the hoped for Elixir."

intent, it has no organic place in the poem, is, in fact, under the circumstances, decidedly anti-climactic. The remainder of the fourth stanza indulges in other wire-drawn subtleties (in figures based on the Aristotelian concept of vegetable and animal souls), to emphasize the utter nothingness of the poet's state.[72] In the final stanza, beginning, "But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew," the framework in which the alchemical figure of the poem has been set is completed by reference, first, to lovers, who are advised to "Enjoy your summer all," and, lastly, to St. Lucy's day:

> and let mee call
> This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
> Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

6

We have examined some twenty-odd figures dependent on Donne's knowledge of the theories and processes of alchemy. The poems which contain these alchemical figures are not limited to one or two of the classifications into which editors have divided his work, but are to be found scattered, in about equal ratio, among most of the classifications.[73] Their dates of composition, insofar as these have been determined or with much probability surmised, comprise the years 1597/8 to 1615, the years during which nearly all, except some of the "Divine Poems," of Donne's poetry was composed. And one of them, *Resurrection, imperfect*, may have been written after the latter date. Donne's employment of alchemical figures, then, is not restricted to any type or subject of his work, nor limited to any specific period in his poetic career. Nor is there any evidence of greater assimilation or wider knowledge of alchemy in the figures of the later poems than in those of the earlier. In fact, probably the most erudite of the alchemical figures occurs in

[72] These are well discussed by Grierson, *op. cit.* 2. 38-39.

[73] Five of the poems containing alchemical figures are among the "Songs and Sonets," three among the "Elegies," one in the group of "Epithalamions," three among the verse "Letters," five among the "Epicedes and Obsequies" and "Epitaphs" (including the two Anniversaries and *Infinitati Sacrum*), and three among the "Divine Poems." There are no alchemical figures in the "Epigrams" or the "Satyres."

The Canonization, a poem belonging, it is generally agreed, to Donne's early poetic years.

The knowledge of alchemy displayed in these figures is not so extensive as that which Chaucer exhibits in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*,[74] nor as that paraded by Jonson in the *Alchemist* and in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*.[75] Donne's figures center around a few alchemical subjects and their ramifications: the physical and esoteric qualities of gold, theories as to the natural generation of gold, theories concerning the elixirs of transmutations, concerning the preparation of the quintessence, or elixir, and, of course, the process of transmutation itself. There is not, however, the wealth of alchemical terms, the glib effusion of theorizings, which characterize Chaucer's and Jonson's alchemical satires. The cases are dissimilar, of course, and scarcely admit comparison. Chaucer and Jonson deliberately exhibited a plethora of things alchemical as one means of achieving their satiric purpose. Donne employed an accurately chosen bit of alchemical theory, a thoroughly apprehended alchemical fact, to illustrate or to body forth a segment of his poetic thought.

But the amount of Donne's alchemical knowledge is, after all, of little importance. An important matter is the originality which Donne displayed in his adaptation of the material of alchemy to his poetical purposes. And analysis of these figures in the light of alchemic literature has, I hope, helped to show the most important matter of all: the precision and skill with which Donne applied the material to his purposes in molding conceits.

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[74] For some discussion of Chaucer's knowledge of alchemy, see my article "The Canon's Yeoman's Silver Citrinacioun," *MP* 37 (1940). 241-262.

[75] *Cf., e. g.*, C. M. Hathaway's edition of the *Alchemist* (Yale Studies in English, XVII). I have in preparation a study of the alchemical backgrounds of Jonson's masque, *Mercury Vindicated*.

CHRISTOPHER SMART AND THE *LILLIPUTIAN MAGAZINE*

By Roland B. Botting

Though many of Christopher Smart's anonymous or pseudononymous contributions to the magazines of his day have recently been identified,[1] almost any of these obscure and ephemeral periodicals is still likely, upon the chance discovery of the necessary clue, to yield hitherto unknown pieces.

A case in point is this "Morning Hymn," which appeared in the second number of the *Lilliputian Magazine*,[2] one of John Newbery's many attempts to provide for the amusement and moral improvement of young readers:

I

O Thou! who lately clos'd my eyes,
And calm'd my soul to rest,
Now the dull blank of darkness flies,
Be thank'd, be prais'd, and blest.

II

And as thou sav'st me in the night
From anguish and dismay,
Lead through the labours of the light,
And dangers of the day.

III

Tho' from thy laws I daily swerve,
Yet still thy mercy grant;
Shield me from all that I deserve,
And grant me all I want.

IV

Howe'er she's tempted to descend,
Keep Reason on her throne;
From all men's passions me defend,
But chiefly from my own.

[1] G. J. Gray, "A Bibliography of the Writings of Christopher Smart," *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 6 (London, 1903). 269-303; Roland B. Botting, "Christopher Smart in London," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, 7 (1939). 1-54; Roland B. Botting, "Johnson, Smart, and the *Universal Visiter*," *Modern Philology*, 36 (1939). 293-300; Robert E. Brittain, "Christopher Smart in the Magazines," *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 44 (London, 1941). 320 ff.

[2] P. 107 of Carnan's 1783 reprint.

V

Give me a heart t'assist the poor,
  Ev'n as thy hand bestows;
For thee and man a love most pure,
  And friendship for my foes.

VI

This, thro' the merits, death, and birth,
  Of our bless'd Lord be given;
So shall I compass peace on earth;
  And endless bliss in heav'n.

This sounds like Smart; and his interest in literature for children, his close connection with Newbery, and numerous more specific hints [3] suggest that he may well have had a part in the *Lilliputian Magazine*. Yet nowhere—least of all in the magazine itself—does one encounter proof of his participation until one happens upon the advertisement of the second number in the London *Daily Advertiser*;[4] among the contents there listed appears "A Morning Hymn for all little, good Boys and Girls, which is also proper for People of riper Years, by Mr. Kitty Smart."[5]

Thus one more poem, distinctly worthy of its author, is added to the canon of Smart's writings and the text made available, and, whether or not any of the other anonymous pieces is his, Smart's connection with another of Newbery's publications is firmly established.

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[3] In the *Drury-Lane Journal*, Thornton listed the *Lilliputian Magazine* with others in which Smart is known to have had a hand; in the magazine itself poems appeared over the names of Miss Peggy Smart and Tommy Trueman (*Herbert Trueman* was one of Smart's many pseudonyms); Christopher Hunter, a relative and later the biographer of Smart, is listed among the subscribers; and "Master Hunter" contributed a distinctly precocious epigram to one of the numbers.

[4] June 29, 1751.

[5] The nickname "Kitty" is explained by the attempt regularly made to give many of the pieces the appearance of being contributions of the juvenile readers. In the reprint of 1783, the title is without significant variation except that the poem is said to be "By a young Gentleman." The removal of Smart's name is doubtless due to the bitter feelings existing between Smart and Newbery after Smart's release from the asylum.

RATIONAL PROOF OF A DEITY FROM THE ORDER OF NATURE

By May Dulaney Bush

"In the beginning God." So it was in the first account of this strange physical order called "nature." And so it was in the rediscovery that the eighteenth century made of the vast external reality as worthy of study and contemplation. From a crucial moment in religious belief came the genesis of the new concept that held sway in neo-classic dicta, underwent many changing interpretations, and finally proved a determining factor in the triumph of Romanticism. At the end of the seventeenth century the very foundations of society had been shaken by the civil wars and political upheaval that grew out of religious dissention. Englishmen were thoroughly weary of strife. The great desire of all thinking men was for order and tolerance. Such a desire could be achieved only by agreement on certain fundamental, universal principles. Fortunately the seventeenth century even through its turmoil had been preparing just such postulates. Strangely enough the century that had produced the work of Bacon, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Locke, and Newton left to their successors the title of "the Enlightenment" or "the Age of Reason." Out of the remarkable development of logical method and the achievements of physical science had come the ideas of reason and nature that were to dominate the thought of the early eighteenth century. Because reason and nature seemed immutable and unassailable bases for faith, the Augustans made a great synthesis of the two and to the resulting abstraction assigned the attributes of divinity.

"This deification of reason and its identification with nature first secured a strong foot-hold in religious ideas."[1] The supernatural receded from attention, but the natural came forward with a new challenge for devotion. Intelligent men need no longer fight over the miracles or despair over the mysteries of their traditional religion. They could rely on their own reason to test truth, and that reason would have ample teleological

[1] J. H. Randall, Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Boston, 1926), p. 282.

proof of a Creator in observing the wisdom and regularity of the creation. "Evidence of God was to be found not in the occasional suspension of natural law, but in its continuous and harmonious operation. Whatever the other results may have been, this change in theology meant at least a theoretic gain for the significance of nature." [2]

This systematic settlement of the fundamental problems of the time may seem to the questioner of today an ineffectual answer to the deeper needs of man's spiritual life. But the rationalists' conception of spiritual aspirations was not today's. In revolt against the excesses of emotion that had marked the religious convulsions of the preceding generation, they found the loftiest culmination of the human soul in reasoned control. Wordsworth placed himself, for the moment, back on neoclassic ground when he wrote,

> Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
> Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve
> The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul;
> A fervent, not ungovernable, love.[3]

But it could not be expected that the neo-classicists would easily project themselves ahead to catch "the visionary gleam" of Wordsworth or to share his gratitude "for those obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things," for "high instincts," and "shadowy recollections" as "the fountain light of all our day." [4] In an age in which even religion came to be largely a science, a verification of propositions, the spiritual life would be held at an intellectual level. Inevitably literature would take its inspiration from that triumphant theme; and truly "the poets of the age of Dryden and Pope were the incarnation of the scientific spirit of their time. They helped make the time what it was by submitting to the innovations. They fixated, so to speak, in art the ideal of the men of science." [5] The great objective of science, standard of art, proof of religious tenets was "Nature," in many of its meanings but

[2] C. A. Moore, "Return to Nature in English Poetry in Eighteenth Century," *SP* 14 (1917). 260.

[3] "Laodamia," ll. 73-6.

[4] "Intimations of Immortality," stanzas 4 and 9.

[5] George Boas, *Major Traditions of European Philosophy* (New York, 1929), p. 198.

primarily in the Newtonian sense of a well designed, law-governed universe. If the exaltation that nature suggested to that day came more from generalized *thinking* about laws of motion than from individual experience with starry nights, still it was the kind of exaltation that reason could approve.

The idea of the importance of nature proved in time to have more vitality than the companion cult of rationalism; it grew and took on new meanings, while the faith in reason gradually faded and withered. As nature came to be thought of less abstractly, less remotely, so did religion; and the soul of man emerged from the tyranny of his reason. The seeker for the genesis of the Wordsworthian doctrine of the spiritual ministry of nature to man cannot neglect that literature of the early years of the century that had as its purpose the proof of a deity from the orderly processes of nature—both for the richer overtones in its own time and for the faint notes of prophecy to the future.

This literature rose from the solid foundation of Newton's cosmology, built by its pattern of order, logic, completeness, and followed its course to God as the final solution or "First Cause." The writers of the day continually sang Newton's praises, deliberately paraphrased his theories, and unconsciously echoed his principles. He had given to England, not unassisted, pre-eminence in the intellectual world, and to Englishmen a view of the universe that justified their optimism and satisfied their demand for certainty. He had tempered the Cartesian rationalism that they distrusted with the Baconion empiricism that they cherished, and he preserved the God of their orthodox religion in the new world-machine of science. Newton's followers, scientific and literary, restated in many ways his proof of the mathematical harmony of the universe. Like him, they "focused attention on that which was concrete, definite, and demonstrable"[6]—usually for a religious purpose. Perhaps many of their productions deserve the description Newton gave to matter: "solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moveable particles";[7] but even from such a flinty substance their

[6] H. Drennon, "Newtonianism: Its Method, Theology, and Metaphysics," *E. St.* 68 (1934). 402. This article and others by the same author are very helpful on the influence of Newton on literature.

[7] *Ibid.*, quoted from *Opera, ed. Horsley* (London, 1779-85), 4. 260.

constant joining of the thought of nature to the power of God was bound to strike some sparks of sublimity. To the Newtonians God was necessary as the maker and sustainer of the vast machine. "The Author" or "The Cause" was everywhere present through the universe, as he is through Newton's pages, but present by his "Sensorium," and not to be identified with his creation. Newton did not foresee that pantheistic identification, nor many of the spiritual outgrowths of his philosophy of nature; but that religious influence was a prime incentive to his labors is certain from such statements as his letter of December 10, 1692, to Dr. Bentley: "When I wrote my treatise about our system, I had an eye upon such principles as might work with considering men for the belief of a Deity, and nothing can rejoice me more than to find it useful for that purpose." [8]

An even greater force than Newton in the subsequent intellectual life of his countrymen was John Locke. If his direct effect upon the concept of nature was less, his illumination of the processes of the mind that contemplates nature amounted to a revolution. By the emphasis he gave to sensation he brought a new importance to the external world as forming the ideas of the inner kingdom of the mind. By his assertion of the individual's right to make judgments he paved the way for a new liberty in morality and politics. And by making the test of truth the reasoning power of the average man he shifted religion from its ancient basis of authority and revelation. Locke's name was extolled in poetry and prose as was Newton's, and his studies made the workings of their own minds a subject of endless fascination to writers after him. His treatises could hardly be called a system, so troublesome were their inconsistencies at the time, and so divergent the tendencies they later fathered. His undermining of authority broke the soil for a growing scepticism, his confidence in common reason gave impetus to the rationalistic movement; but his attention to sensation prepared for the "influence of natural objects" in theories of association and analyses of imagination, and his stripping away of non-essentials from religious belief opened up new possibilities for spiritual experience. And so he takes his

[8] H. Craik, ed., *English Prose* (London, 1908), 3. 313.

place beside Newton. No thought-wave of the century can be traced far without crossing their currents. " The significance of these two men, in spite of their own outstanding achievements, lies not so much in what they themselves did, as in what they stood for to that age, and in the very fact that they became to an increasing multitude the symbols for certain great ideas." [9]

Locke had the misfortune to strike at the roots of institutions where he intended only to clear away the weeds, and to lay corner-stones for structures he would have abhorred. Thus, his name is ever associated with the development of deism though he himself was orthodox in belief. In this he shared the fate of his predecessor, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), who some sixty years after his death was given credit for being the father of deism, from his tract, *de Veritate*, composed for a very different purpose. Except for the few who proudly claimed the title, it was and is difficult to know which of the early eighteenth century writers to label as " Deist." Even those who championed the cause differed widely in their definition of it, and many who disavowed the philosophy were strongly influenced by its vogue. Adherents and opponents agreed in making " Deism " synonymous with " natural religion," but the latter term was susceptible of almost as many interpretations as the former. Earlier deists were Newtonians in so far as they held to immanence too. The essential principle upon which they could agree was that true and universal religion was established by the reason and so must renounce special revelation and all the supernatural. Perhaps Shaftesbury, who was not, strictly speaking, a deist, best presents the liberal position: " Whatsoever is superior in any degree over the World, or rules in Nature with Discernment and a Mind, is what, by universal Agreement, Men call GOD." [10] This " natural religion " had little to do with either external nature or personal religion, as those words are now generally understood. But it had the germ of a more sensitive attitude to both. The rational aspects of the controversy were too far removed from everyday life to get any hold in the popular mind, but the association of nature

[9] J. H. Randall, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 253.

[10] Earl of Shaftesbury, " Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," 1. 1. 2, *Characteristics* (Dublin, 1743), 2. 10.

with God took root, long remained dormant, and later bore fruit. It is possibly an overstatement of the case, to say that

> If romanticism may be taken in the popular interpretation of including our modern sympathy for all nature and a belief in its moral and spiritual association with human life—such a creed as we find, for example, in Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley—then Deism may be said to be the starting point for our modern, romantic treatment of nature; [11]

but it certainly is one of the elements in the philosophic synthesis of the Enlightenment that held implications, unsuspected at the time, that pointed to a breakdown of that orderly pattern of thought.

Against this intellectual background of the first quarter of the century no one could appear more compatibly or more significantly than Addison. Spokesman for so much that was conservative and typical of his little world, he was yet an innovator of many interests that were later to be considered "Romantic." The experimenter in periodicals, popularizer of the personal essay, champion of ballads, restorer of Milton brought also his contribution to the infant belief in external nature's mighty resources for the inner life of man. Addison could without any hesitation spread out his opinions on aesthetics, politics, religion, or philosophy because he had absorbed the faith of his time in the ability of common sense (or reason) to solve these problems. Free from the despised impediments of "pedantry" and girded with the polish expected of an educated gentleman, he was untroubled by any misgivings about complacency or superficiality. What "the spacious firmament on high" spoke to him, he passed on to his readers, confident that they would approve—and they did.

At the time that Swift and Pope were scoffing at the Royal Society and the virtuosi, Addison was fascinated by the current "natural philosophy." He felt a pious reverence for Newton, and caught from him not only ideas but also inspiration, The largeness of his outlook, the simplicity of his pronouncements are heightened, when he sets out into Newton's territory, by a

[11] C. A. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

nobility very different from the occasional chattiness of the Spectator, but equally characteristic. Reason, Newton, God, and the planetary system were all very closely associated in his mind when he wrote,

> The more extended our Reason is, and the more able to grapple with immense objects, the greater still are those discoveries which it makes of Wisdom and Providence in the work of the Creation. As Sir Isaac Newton, who stands up as the Miracle of the Present age, can look through a whole Planetary System; consider it in its Weight, Number, and Measure; and draw from it as many Demonstrations of infinite Power and Wisdom, as a more confined Understanding is able to deduce from the System of an Human Body.[12]

Even such a little passage as this shows Addison's feeble attempt to rationalize his serious discourses into " demonstrations," and his proneness to start off soaringly and end up limpingly. Sometimes the writing of prescriptions for his daily readers from ingredients of the reigning philosophy got him into more serious logical difficulties. He could start out with a clear division:

> Religion may be considered under two General Heads. . . . By those things which we are to believe, I mean whatever is revealed to us in the Holy Writings, and which we could not have obtained the Knowledge of by the Light of Nature; by the things we are to practice, I mean all those Duties to which we are directed by Reason or Natural Religion. The first of these I shall distinguish by the name of Faith, the second by that of Morality.[13]

But in the continuation of this lay Sermon, the next Saturday [14] he confused this division by recommending as the final method " for giving life to a man's faith "—not to his morality—retirement and solitary observation of nature. For

> In our Retirements everything disposes us to be serious—Faith and Devotion naturally grow in the Mind of every reasonable Man, who sees the Impression of Divine Power and Wisdom in every object on which he casts his Eye. The Superior Being has made the best Arguments for his own Existence in the Formation of the Heavens and Earth, and these are Arguments which a Man of Sense cannot forbear attending to, who is out of the Noise and Hurry of Human Affairs.

[12] *Spectator* 543, Nov. 22, 1712.
[13] *Spectator* 459, August 16, 1712.
[14] *Spectator* 465, August 23, 1712.

Thus he concluded in a deistic compromise in which nature stimulated faith as well as duty. But in this very interesting paper Addision added a note that was no regular part of the rational system—the need for emotion in religion: " The devout Man does not only believe but feels that there is a Deity. He had actual Sensations of him; his Experience concurs with his Reason."

The Ode that concludes this same issue of the *Spectator* is Addison's best claim to be numbered among the English poets and the earliest poem of the century to voice positively, feelingly, and poetically the assurance of a deity from the wonder of the universe. Familiar as they are, the three brief stanzas deserve quotation here:

> The Spacious Firmament on high,
> With all the blue Etherial Sky,
> And spangled Heav'ns, a shining Frame,
> Their great Original proclaim:
> The unwearied Sun, from Day to Day,
> Does his Creator's Power display,
> And publishes to every Land
> The Work of an Almighty Hand.
>
> Soon as the Evening Shades prevail
> The Moon takes up the wondrous Tale,
> And nightly to the listening Earth
> Repeats the story of her Birth
> Whilst all the Stars that round her burn
> And all the planets in their turn
> Confirm the Tidings as they rowl,
> And spread the Truth, from Pole to Pole.
>
> What though, in Solemn Silence, all
> Move round the dark terrestial Ball?
> What tho' nor real Voice nor Sound
> Amid their radiant Orbs be found?
> In Reason's Ear they all rejoice
> And utter forth a glorious Voice
> Forever singing as they shine,
> " The Hand that made us is Divine."

Addison gave no indication that those lines sprang from his own reaction under the sky or contained any original thought, but frankly acknowledged them as a paraphrase of the nineteenth psalm. The change from " The heavens declare the glory of

God" for the first line and from "ends of the world" for "from Pole to Pole," and the other substitutions of more abstract, scientific terminology may be questioned as poetic improvements. In the discussion he compared David's psalm to Aristotle's figure (so he ascribes it, though he summarizes Plato's figure at the beginning of the seventeenth book of the Republic) of the cave, in its visual evidence of divine creation, but the reworking he gives the conception is thoroughly Newtonian. It is really a rational argument, well-ordered, controlled, and dignified. Yet it is more, for sincerity and feeling are here. All nature hymns the Creator, and though man is not mentioned in the poem (unless in "Reason's Ear"), there can be no doubt that Addison himself shares in the exaltation.

Besides its mute testimony to a beneficent deity and the vague solemnity it lends to man, Addison found in nature other more immediate and practical values. Some of his remarks are commonplace in any age, and most of them are chilled by the utilitarian atmosphere, but their cumulative effect is an awareness of nature's powers surprising in the comparative wasteland of contemporary writing. Thus, there is nothing exceptional about his insistence on the benefits to health, both physical and mental, teaching that

> Delightful scenes whether in Nature, Painting, or Poetry, have a Kindly influence on the Body, as well as the Mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the Imagination, but are able to disperse Grief and Melancholy, and to set the Animal Spirits in pleasing and agreeable Motions.[15]

The "Motion of mind" was a favorite phrase and the most engrossing of subjects to him. From his readings of Locke, whom he praised and quoted continually, and from his analysis of the imagination, he came to value images from nature stored in the mind, not in any such appreciation as Wordsworth or his Wanderer felt looking back to their childhood surroundings, but still for an energizing effect. It is noticeable that he thought the mind particularly stimulated by wide, sweeping prospects: "A spacious horizon is an Image of liberty, when the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the immensity

[15] *Spectator* 411, June 21, 1712.

of the Views, and to lose itself amid the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observations." [16]

In at least one of his essays Addison revealed a simple personal experience with the out of doors that led to genuine reflections on the terror nature could arouse and the solace she could bring to the human heart. It was only an evening when he was " about Sunset walking in The open Fields, 'till the Night fell insensibly upon me." [17] But it was such a walk as, had Addison lived a hundred years later and possessed Wordsworth's poetic power, might have become one of those " spots of time,/ That with distinct pre-eminence retain/ A renovating virtue." [18] As the colors faded away and the stars and planets came out one after another, a thought rose in him that he wisely let David express for him: " When I consider the Heavens the work of thy Fingers, . . . what is Man, that thou art mindful of him? " He rescued himself from the sudden despondency by thinking of the omnipresence and omniscience of God, in " all of nature even to the least of mankind." [19] Then he could " utterly extinguish this melancholy Thought, of our being overlooked by our Maker in the Multiplicity of his Works."

It would of course be a mistake to overemphasize the proportion or significance of Addison's treatment of nature in relation to the " hiding places of man's power." He was far more at home on city streets than in spreading fields. He wrote for his middle class London subscribers what they wanted to read. What descriptive verse he did write is utterly conventional. The " Letter from Italy . . . to Lord Halifax " paints with vague grandeur the Claudesque views that were popular, in words that were to later periods the most unforgivable of neoclassic sins. National pride made him look patronizingly on

[16] *Spectator* 412, June 23, 1712.
[17] *Spectator* 565, July 9, 1714.
[18] *Prelude* 12. 208-10.
[19] Addison's " he [God] cannot but be conscious of every Motion that arises in the whole Material World, which he thus essentially pervades, and of every Thought that is Stirring in the intellectual World, to every part of which he is thus intimately united " may be compared with the Tintern Abbey lines about

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

though the " presence " that animates the two differs enormously.

other lands, and the utilitarian bias made him see only that the river

> . . . proudly swoln with a whole winter's snows
> Distributes wealth and plenty where he flows.

In his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* he expressed an admiration for mountains that was unusual for a traveler of his day, but his pleasure was chiefly in the picturesque effects and suggests no great emotional or spiritual response. He took only a scientific interest in volcanoes and other " natural curiosities," and scanned landscapes eagerly for settings of historical events or for connections with his precious Latin poetry. Even in the *Spectator* he has successfully hidden himself behind his writings, and when he does emerge he wins little respect and less affection. He was no profound thinker, but he was no fool. Perhaps the perfect representative of the standards of his age, he has been explained as " The First Victorian ";[20] yet he might also in many respects be called the " The First Romantic." Though he was conscious of a mission of reforming his generation, the objectives of his program were definitely not on the side of Romanticism. What slender lines he threw out in that direction were incidental, if not accidental, but they can be traced through by-ways into the high ways as the century progressed. Of the surprising threads in his discourse, there was one that tied man to God and nature in a bond that was strengthen greatly with the years.

In the year Addison wrote his *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost* and on the imagination (1712), Sir Richard Blackmore, physician to Queen Anne, who had already produced heroic and epic poems distinguished chiefly by their length, published a long didactic poem called " The Creation." The opening lines announced his change in subject matter:

> No more of courts, of triumphs, or of arms,
> No more of valour's force, or beauty's charms, . . .
> I meditate to soar above the skies
> To heights unknown, through ways untry'd to rise:
> I would th' Eternal from his works assert,
> And sing the wonders of creating art. (1. 1-13)

[20] By Bonamy Dobree in the essay of that title in *Essays in Biography* (London, 1925).

The preface stated this purpose and with it the irritant that called it forth:

> The design of this poem is to demonstrate the self-existence of the Eternal Mind from the created and dependent existence of the universe, and to confute the hypothesis of the Epicureans and the Fatalists, under whom all the patrons of impiety, ancient or modern, of whatsoever denomination, may be ranged.[21]

The demonstrations were continuing their syllogistic rule in the courts of literature and this time in a positive dispute with clearly designated adversaries—the philosophic descendants of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, the " assertors of impiety " and Hobbes, that " insulting Briton." Opposed to these demons of atheism and agnosticism, he set up the mighty Newton, whom he proceeded to praise after a summary of the systems of Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Kepler:

> The masters form'd in Newton's famous school,
> Who does the chief in modern science rule,
> Erect their schemes by mathematic laws
> And solve appearances with just applause:
> These, who have Nature's steps with care pursued,
> That matter is with active force endued. . . .
> This wondrous power, they piously assert
> Th' Almighty Author did at first impart. (2. 554-71)

This labored passage is more concerned with Newton's piety than with his science, and both are used merely for support of his argument. Newton and Science no more stirred his imagination than God and Nature elevated his Soul; they are all symbols in an equation he is proving.

Locke's conclusions were also versified for Blackmore's purposes:

> When man with reason dignify'd is born
> No images his naked mind adorn; . . .
> He no innate ideas can discern
> Of Knowledge destitute, though apt to learn. . . .
> When objects through the senses passage gain
> And fill with various imagery the brain
> Th' ideas, which the mind does thence perceive,
> To think and know the first occasion give. (8. 228-41)

[21] Sir Richard Blackmore, *Creation, a Philosophic Poem* (London, 1715), p. xlvii.

In fact, after stating this same theory of the ideas in prose in his preface, the author only bowed condescendingly to the philosopher: "In this opinion, which I had many years ago entertained, I was afterwards confirmed by the famous author of the Essay on Human Understanding." An author who could be thus unmoved by the great human personalities whose experiments he respected, would look upon the earth for its convenience to his use with no sense of wonder. "Nature" was the magic word of his time, and having had some scientific training for his medical career, he felt fully qualified to expound the principles of the natural order for the edification of the pious and the confusion of the wicked doubters. From "the structure and qualities of earth and sea" he found data for this first book, from the celestial motions and solar system for another; the body of man and the instincts of animals furnish the two final divisions of this elaborate argument for deity.

Though the major significance of the physical world to Blackmore was its validation of a theory under attack, it was only in considering certain minor values that he lost himself enough to express any ardor. Theoretically and consciously he found the glory of nature in the divine justice of her laws, but actually and perhaps unconsciously he warmed to the thought of her pleasure to the eye and usefulness of man's needs. The handiwork of God is momentarily overlooked, the view is extremely generalized and remote, but Blackmore is coming close to exuberance when he chants,

> See how sublime th' uplifted mountains rise
> And with their pointed heads invade the skies!
> How the high cliffs their craggy arms extend,
> Distinguished states, and fevered realms defend!
> How ambient shores confine the restless deep,
> And in their ancient bounds the billows keep! . . .
> Observe the pleasant lawn and airy plain,
> The fertile furrows rich with various grain
> How useful all! how all conspire to grace
> Th' extended earth, and beautify her face! (1. 424-51)

He also disclosed a historical interest in the process of creation that is hardly expected of one obsessed with the evidence of divine fiat. At times he was even coming close to the idea of evolution, when his imagination ran back to the unformed youth of the earth,

Ere yet one subterranean arch was made
One cavern vaulted, or one girder laid;
Ere the high rocks did o'er the shores arise
Or snowy mountains tower'd amidst the skies . . .
She sung how Nature then in embryo lay
And did the secrets of her birth display. (7.567-78)

At rare intervals in the course of this arid exposition he fused the emotion that colored these less deliberate approaches to his subject with the main religious purpose and caught gleams of a higher spiritual kinship of nature to man. At such moments he may have been "moving about in worlds unrealized," but he did sense that

The mind employ'd in search of secret things,
To find out motion's cause and hidden springs,
Through all th' eternal regions mounts on high,
Views all the spheres, and ranges all the sky;
Searches the orbs, and penetrates the air
With unsuccessful toil, and fruitless care;
Till, stopp'd by awful heights, and gulfs immense
Of Wisdom, and of vast Omnipotence,
She trembling stands and does in wonder gaze
Lost in the wide inextricable maze. (2.561-70)

This is as near as he gets to wonder and as deep as he penetrates in mystery, but if there had been more of even such lines, Blackmore's poem would be more tolerable to modern readers and more important to the study of the literature of his time.

Today it seems remarkable that the poem should have won the praise it did from distinguished contemporary critics. Just a month after it appeared Addison wrote in one of his series on *Paradise Lost*,

> I cannot conclude this Book upon the Creation without mentioning a Poem which has lately appeared under that Title. The work was undertaken with so good an intention and is executed with so great a mastery that it deserves to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble Productions in our English verse.[22]

From the number of its editions it must have won popular approval. And when Johnson wrote his *Lives*, it still had a vigorous defender. Those who read him gladly had requirements for poetry different from those of the following century.

[22] *Spectator* 339, March 29, 1712.

His mechanically easy and epigrammatic couplets were pleasing to their ears. He made no attempt at originality and they expected none.[23] Johnson still shared their taste when he wrote that " To reason in verse is allowed to be difficult, but Blackmore not only reasons in verse but very often reasons poetically." [24] For a long time that type of poetry has been in eclipse and Blackmore forgotten except by those who search into outmoded ways for clues to something beyond.

Another voice in the chorus of praise to the Creator of the wondrous universe was Thomas Parnell's, who joined in with his " Hymn to Contentment " in 1714. He wrote with ease and with some of the charm that must have endeared him to cultivated society the verses that were fashionable—satires, translations, anacreontics, and occasional pieces. In most of them nature has no part, though in " A Night-Piece on Death " the setting serves to reflect the poet's melancholy mood, and in mirroring it to multiply its weird effect.

In the one lyric, " Hymn to Contentment," however, he took up the search without for an abiding assurance within. Looking at the pleasant country side rather than at abstract " Nature " and looking into his own heart at the same time, he made God seem nearer to both. He made no dogmatic assertions, he developed no logical conclusions, but his tentative, confused reachings after the secrets of life are thereby the more appealing. Retirement poems such as Pomfret's " Choice " were popular with the citified Augustans who had taken the suggestion to their hearts from their beloved Horace and cherished it under conditions of society not very different from his. But here was a new member of the genre that broke the mold by suggesting rewards less familiar and less obvious. The poet seeking for " Lovely, lasting Peace of Mind " quickly dismissed wordly ambition and gold as delusions and found that adventures abroad are no better escape, for " Thou wert not in the Rocks and Waves." Nearer to Pomfret than to Wordsworth, he " learns to know/ That Solitude's the Nurse of Woe." Those

[23] In the Preface he said, " I may with Reason presume that I shall not incur any Censure for not employing new Arguments to prove the Being of a God; none but what have been produc'd before by many Writers, even from the Eldest Days of Philosophy." P. xlii.

[24] *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. Hill (Oxford, 1905), p. 254.

who recommended a rural retreat as an earthly paradise were mistaken; to go to nature unprepared could bring no spiritual consolation. Even to " converse with stars above " might engender doubts from knowledge (a strange note in the Newtonian world) unless what he seeks is already in his heart. Only when he came in obedience and faith did the gardens delight him with their colors and the silver waters with their music. Then indeed the spirit of nature spoke;

> It seem'd as all the quiet Place
> Confess'd the Presence of the Grace.
> When thus she spoke—Go rule thy Will,
> Bid thy wild passions all be still
> Know God—and bring thy Heart to know
> The Joys which from Religion flow.

This part of the poem is soundly neo-classic in its insistence upon self-control as the first requisite. But even the Romantic writers of the next century were to continue the belief that man can get from nature only what he gives to her.

In the last two stanzas the Hymn merges into the theme of Addison's " Spacious Firmament " ode. The sun, moon, stars, and the woods and fields testify of God. But the poet himself is much more present in this poem. Indeed he is the one thing needed. Without him the heavens declare the glory of God very inadequately:

> They speak their Maker as they can
> But want and ask the Tongue of Man.

Though this seems to be a digression from the original quest for contentment, all the confused and incoherent parts do form a multiple answer to the single question. Once he has taught his heart to submit to the " inner check," he is filled with a sense of gratitude, and as he tries to express his joy he realizes that nature sings with him, and for the same cause. He has found the way to " bliss," not by dreams or escape, but in this life, by putting himself in harmony with the divine law and order of the universe. The austere " demonstration " has faded into a more immediate human relationship, when the poet in such fluent and seemingly sincere lines vows,

> I'll lift my Voice and tune my String
> And thee, great *Source of Nature* Sing

Even John Gay, the professional Londoner and a still more worldly member of Pope's inner circle, took up the refrain in praising the inventor of the Newtonian world-machine, but he made no distinctive contribution to the common idea and seems to have echoed it more from convention than from conviction. He cared more for the country, and particularly for the homely details of country life, than any of the literary elite of his time as his Pastorals, in spite of their intended rustic satire, clearly show. But there is no intimation that he found in the life close to the soil any richer nourishment for the soul. His shepherds and their lassies are lively English folk, but they are not forbears of Michael and Ruth. True, one of his shepherds progressed from pastoral satire into didactic eloquence.[25] This shepherd who had a reputation for wisdom visited

> A deep Philosopher (whose rules
> Of moral life were drawn from schools)

and confounded him with such trite precepts as

> The daily labours of the bees
> Awake my soul to industry

until the learned man admits superiority:

> Thy fame is just, the sage replies,
> Thy virtue proves thee truly wise;
> Pride often guides the author's pen,
> Books as affected are as men,
> But he who studies nature's laws
> From certain truth his maxims draws.

If Gay did not prove the peasant superior in moral insight, he at least proved his converse—that books can be affected.

It is in the one poem called "A Contemplation on Night," of 1714, that Gay took up the "Music of the turning spheres" as a proper subject for composition whether or not he himself could ever hear that ineffable harmony. His couplets have a more tinkling sound, and his words are merely words.

> Whether amid the gloom of night I stray
> Or my glad eyes enjoy revolving day
> Still Nature's various face informs my sense,
> Of an all-wise, all-powerful Providence.

[25] "The Shepherd and The Philosopher," Introduction to the *Fables*.

Gay undoubtedly had a keen power of observation and some zest for life beyond city walls. But these did not give him the ideas of nature for his "contemplation." Simple enjoyment was not to be disturbed by serious meditation. Genuine thought was sacrificed to the craving for popular approval as his other talents were prostituted to patronage and applause.

Of a different temper entirely was the earnest young Henry Needler who set himself seriously to the task of praising and popularizing the philosophy that grew from the Newtonian theories. He felt the need for a thorough preparation and, as his editor says,

> He apply'd himself, at his Intervals of Leisure, to reading the *Classicks*, and to the study of *Logick*, and the *Mathematicks*, with which last he was particularly delighted . . . he acquir'd a considerable knowledge in the most difficult Branches of these useful and entertaining Studies.

Indeed the account continues that "by so close an application, he contracted a violent Pain in his Head, which notwithstanding the best advice, daily increased"[26] and led to his death at the age of twenty-eight in 1718. Perhaps he felt the import of this rationalized cult of nature more than any of those who wrote about it. Certainly his verses "To Sir Richard Blackmore, on his Poem, entitled 'Creation'" express enthusiasm for the subject more than for the poem:

> But O! what Numbers shall I find, to tell
> The mighty Transports which my Bosom swell,
> Whilst, guided by thy tuneful Voice, I stray
> Thro' Radiant Worlds, and Fields or Native Day
> Wafted from Orb to Orb, unwearied fly,
> Thro' the blue Regions of the yielding sky,
> See how the Spheres in stated courses roll,
> And view the just Composure of the whole![27]

He takes up the theme in his own right in "A Hymn in Praise of the Creator."[28] The introductory appeal to his Muse, for all its burden of conventionality, moves with freshness and simplicity:

[26] H. Needler, *Works*, ed. W. Duncombe (London, 1735), p. ii.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Hark! how the Buds, on ev'ry blooming spray,
With spritely Notes accuse the dull Delay.
See how the Spring, adorn'd with gaudy Pride
And youthful Beauty, Smiles on ev'ry side! . . .
All things to verse invite.

Then as he finds his subject and wins his inspiration, he rises higher and higher in exaltation as he chants,

Thee, Best and Greatest! let my grateful Lays,
Parent of Universal Nature, praise!
All things are full of Thee! where 'er mine Eye
Is turn'd, I still thy present Godhead spy!
Each Herb the Foot steps of thy Wisdom bears
And every Blade of Grass thy Pow'r declares!
As yon' clear Lake the pendent Image shows
Of ev'ry flower that on its Border grows
So, in the fair Creator's Glass we find
A faint Reflection of th' External Mind.

Needler is hampered by the only means of expression that his generation furnished him. His neo-classic couplets almost conceal a deeper poetic feeling, and a deeper response to grass and lake and flower that is struggling to be free. We wonder whether we might say, " there but for the changes of ninety years, goes a young Wordsworth."

Throughout the slim little volume of his translations, poems, essays, and letters there runs an awareness that his own spirit is fed by association with the least or greatest manifestations of the " Wisdom and spirit of the Universe." There are sensitively observed details in his couplets giving " A Description of a Summer Night in the Country," and even his listing of the trees, and of the flowers " as in each Month of the Spring and Summer a new Sett appears " betrays a zest not to be smothered by the prosy argument of his essay, " On the Beauty of the Universe." The published letters (all twenty-five written between his nineteenth and twenty-first years) show his early fondness for argument, for its own sake, and his great joy in reading, especially in Locke and Newton; but they also show his genuine pleasure and profit from soiltary visiting with growing things in open spaces. Samples from three different letters are:

I had always a natural Inclination for the Country, and aversion

to the Town. . . . We . . . like Trees thrive and prosper best in our Native Soil; but if transplanted, are apt to pine and languish.

How little is the Difference between the wisest Philosopher, and the most ignorant Peasant? The poorest Flower in the Field, the smallest Blade of Grass will baffle the Understanding of the one as well as of the other.

I frequently walk out by myself into the Fields adjoining to this Town, 'till I lose myself. . . . Every Herb, every Flower, or little Insect I meet with, affords me the matter of delightful speculation and Amusement. . . . at such a time my thoughts naturally take a Solemn and Religious Turn. I consider the whole Scene of Nature as the work of a Supreme Being; Every Part of which abounds with Proofs and Instances of the Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of its Maker.[29]

But his clearest expression of personal and spiritual uplift, quite different from the impersonal proofs of God that others were versifying, he poured out to an oak tree as he lay in its shade:

> Provok'd by Birds that tune their Lays
> And Winds that whisper in thy Sprays,
> When I survey thy stately Head
> And aged Trunk with Moss o'er spread,
> Diviner Thoughts enrich my Brain
> And lift me to a loftier strain.[30]

"Reason," "clarity," "conviction," and "mind" were the resounding words in the religious poems of Samuel Boyse. There is no reflection of his irresponsible, dissipated life in the dignity, piety, and loftiness of the poetry. From the earliest *Poems*, published in 1731, through *The Deity*, in 1739, God and reason are constantly associated with nature. Boyse asked of "this glorious frame," this varied, spacious universe, the old question, *Whence* did it arise? And the universe answered clearly,

> Here reason its eternal Author finds,
> The whole who regulates, unites, and binds,
> Enlivens matter, and produces minds![31]

Though the proof of God from nature seemed incontrovertible

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 111, 134-5.
[30] *Ibid.*, "Written under an Oak," p. 22.
[31] "Eternity," *Works of the English Poets* (ed. Chalmers, London, 1810), 14. 545.

to him, Boyse felt, as did many of these writers, considerable concern about those who challenged the argument:

> Him, sole Almighty, Nature's book displays,
> Distinct the page, and legible the rays!
> Let the wild sceptic his attention throw
> To the broad horizon, or Earth below;
> He finds thy soft impression touch his breast,
> He feels the God and owns him unconfest.[32]

God himself is infinite, beyond the furthest reach of human thought, but His power displayed in the created world is so obvious that only the most blind and perverse could doubt.

> Yet present to all sense thy pow'r remains,
> Reveal'd in nature, Nature's Author reigns!
> In vain would errour from conviction fly
> Thou ev'rywhere art present to the eye.[33]

His conception of God, and so of nature, though argumentative and rational was warm, grateful for beauty, and filled with wonder—

> This all resplendent orb of vital light;
> Whence all created beings take their rise,
> Which beautify the Earth or paint the skies!
> Profusely wide the boundless blessings flow
> Which Heav'n enrich and gladden worlds below!
> Which are no less when properly defin'd,
> Than emanations of the Eternal Mind![34]

Still more absorbed in the rational perfection of nature's orderly processes was Isaac Hawkins Browne. His poem "On Design and Beauty" (written sometime before 1743) exemplifies neo-classic standards of art as well as of nature. He had an abhorrence of the vast. To him regularity of plan and mechanical precision of performance were the desiderata of a higher power, and so he looked for these in the physical realm and ascribed them to his God.

> Such are the beauties of the Universe;
> The various movements of this great machine,
> All are directed by one Power within;
> One Genius, as in human frame the Soul,
> Rules, and pervades, and animates the whole.[35]

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[32] "Omnipotence," *Ibid.*, p. 547. [33] *Ibid.* [34] "Eternity," p. 545.
[35] I. H. Browne, *Poems upon Various Subjects* (London, 1768), p. 98.

In his long poem in Latin, "On the Immortality of the Soul" (1754, translated by Soame Jenyns), which won him his chief distinction, he expanded more upon the reassurances nature gives man of an order and plan in all things. Here are no fleeting "Intimations of Immortality;" to find the truth man should turn to "the great law by Nature given" and "ratify'd by Heaven."[36] There he may find the final word: "That there's a God from Nature's voice is clear."[37]

The proof of a deity from the order of external nature continued long into the century as accepted subject matter for essays in verse or prose. As time went on, it absorbed new ideas that changed it and gradually crowded it out. Perhaps the type reached its culmination in Pope's "Essay on Man" in 1733, though by this time Pope's purpose was not to prove a creator but to "vindicate the ways of God to Man." His exposition of the very limited sense in which "whatever is, is right"[38] became the "best known philosophical poem in the English language." The theodicy that he rationalized through the four epistles of his "moralized" song was a thoroughly neoclassic basis for the so-called optimism of the century, though it contained ideas pregnant with romantic possibilities, such as the chain of being with its corollary plenitude or fullness of nature. Pope was one of those who never missed an opportunity to rail at science, yet religion too was pared away from his scheme of the universe. In all his paeans of the order of nature, it is doubtful whether there is a single line that indicates any insight into the release that can come to the soul of a man through communion with nature.

The importance of his ideas about nature is not their source—whatever may be found about his debt to Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, King, Bentley, or Locke[39]—for the ideas were prevalent

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 84. [37] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[38] A. O. Lovejoy, "Optimism and Romanticism," *PMLA* 42 (1927), 921-45. Anyone who writes at all on the "Essay on Man" must be indebted to this article, also to Dr. Lovejoy's "Pride in Eighteenth Century Thought," *MLN* 26 (1921). 31-7, with its explanation of the meaning of pride in relation to the "Chain of Being," which is more fully analyzed in his *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, 1936).

[39] A. O. Lovejoy, in "Optimism and Romanticism," p. 926, says there can not be much doubt that Pope got the conceptions for his essay from King's *De Origine Mali*, directly or through Bolingbroke. J. W. Beach, *The Concept of Nature in*

in his time and were obviously neither original nor profound in his work. Dr. Johnson competently characterized Pope's handling of them when he said that "Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised.[40] The significance of Pope's part was the neatness with which he crystallized the ideas into epigramatic verses and the great circulation he gave them in this readily transmissible form. As Pope expressed them there was little or no spiritual implication, but as they fell on richer soil they took on varied forms of life.

Later in time but still dominated by the motives and concepts that had been ascendant since Addison and the beginning of the century, came Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, first published in 1744. New winds had ruffled the placid waters of rationalized nature poetry, but the old current was still running deep. Akenside wrote after Shaftesbury's aesthetic interpretation had gained recognition and after Thomson's enthusiasm had caught the popular approval. He showed some of their mellowing influence, but he was fundamentally conservative and still ruled by the older scientific, intellectual standards. Pleasure and even passion had crept into the freer lines of blank verse, but from first to last the metaphysical aspect was the supreme end of attention to the physical world. To the most tempered and finely wrought minds the "Sire Omnipotent unfolds" in "the world's harmonious volume . . . the transcript of Himself."[41]

Akenside was of a studious disposition and reflected in his writing his absorption of both contemporary and ancient authors. To Addison he was indebted not only for the title and much of the subject matter of his chief work, but also for its general tone—moralizing, cool, and elegant. In the "design" prefixed to the poem he gave the outline he had borrowed from

Nineteenth Century English Poetry, p. 171, thinks Pope's lines are closer to Bentley's and that most likely Pope and Bentley, and King too for that matter, draw their suggestions from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book 2, Ch. 23.

[40] *Op. cit.* 3. 243.

[41] Mark Akenside, *Poetical Works* (London, 1845), p. 89. AI 99-100. The original 1744 version, A, of *The Pleasure of the Imagination* is referred to except where special attention is called to B, the unfinished revision of 1757-60.

the *Spectator* series on the subject. This plan he versified into more " poetic " words as

> The powers of Fancy, her delighted sons
> To three illustrious orders have referr'd,
> Three sister graces, whom the painter's hand,
> The poet's tongue confesses; the sublime,
> The wonderful, the fair. (1. 142-6)

It is obvious that he assumed the definition of the terms that Addison had explicitly stated:

> by the Pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy (which I shall use promiscuously) I here mean such as arise from visible Objects, either when we have them actually in our View, or when we call up their Ideas into our Minds by Paintings, Statutes, Descriptions, or any the like Occasions.[42]

Like Addison, in dealing with each of these powers he sought for its " final cause." His analysis of the human mind depended upon the properties of nature, which depended upon the mind divine.

Yet in the amplification of his borrowed subject Akenside was clearly under the influence of Shaftesbury. Especially was this true when he came to identify beauty with truth and with goodness—which he does again and again:

> . . . Thus was Beauty sent from heaven,
> The lovely ministress of Truth and Good
> In this dark world: for Truth and Good are one,
> And Beauty dwells with them, and they in her,
> With like participation. (1. 372-6)

This, of course, was also Platonic, but in a footnote to the lines Akenside made it plain that he owed it to Shaftesbury: " This excellent observation has been illustrated and extended by the noble restorer of Ancient Philosophy; see the *Characteristics*, Vol. 2, p. 339 and p. 442, and vol. 3, p. 181. . . . "[43] Though in his progress through this trinity he puts his greatest stress on truth, he most reflects Shaftesbury when he lingers on beauty. The " sensibility " standard is aloft when he asks,

> What then is taste, but these internal powers
> Active, and strong, and feelingly alive
> to each fine impulse? (3. 515-7)

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[42] *Spectator* 411, June 21, 1712.

[43] Akenside, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

and when he asks again,

> In Nature's fairest forms is aught so fair
> as virtuous friendship? (1. 504-4)

Nature, both external and human, has become all "benevolence," "harmony," and "universal good." But however much the learned doctor might take from Shaftesbury's words and ideas, he could not achieve the earl's grandeur or sincerity. What he wrote of the effects of nature on the mind of man had none of the urgency of Shaftesbury's deep conviction.

As a matter of fact Akenside's own concept of the world of phenomena seems to have been a strange mixture of Platonic "essences" and "forms" with the "numbers," "motions," and "laws" of contemporary science, with nothing added from personal experience. His sketch of the formation of the world is purely Platonic, with no Biblical or Newtonic echoes and no evolutionary hints. Before the sun or moon or mountains existed,

> Then liv'd the almighty One: then deep-retir'd
> In his unfathom'd essence, view'd the forms,
> The forms eternal of created things;
> The radiant sun, and moon's nocturnal lamp,
> The mountain, woods, and streams, the rolling globe,
> And Wisdom's mien celestial. From the first
> Of days, on them his love divine he fix'd,
> His admiration: till in time complete
> What he admir'd and lov'd, his vital smile
> Unfolded into being. (1. 66-73)

This explanation of love as a creative natural force is a most interesting revival; and elsewhere not only when he speaks of such abstractions as "Beauty" and "Truth" but also when he considers the material universe he is much given to Platonic language. Yet Akenside was something of a scientist and had had thorough training as a physician, both in England and at Leyden. When he wrote his "Hymn to Science"[44] (in 1739, at the age of eighteen) he used the word science in its broader meaning of knowledge or rational inquiry, but he showed particular interest in Locke's division of the qualities of nature into primary or objective (he gives three of these in Locke's own words) and the secondary or subjective:

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

Give me to learn each secret cause;
Let number's, figure's, motion's laws
Revealed before me stand;
These to great Nature's scenes apply,
And round the globe, and through the sky,
Disclose her working hand.

Next, to the nobler search resign'd,
The busy, restless, Human Mind
Through ev'ry maze pursue;
Detect Perception where it lies,
Catch the Ideas as they rise,
And all their changes view.

He sprinkled his poetry liberally with such popular terms from science as "symmetry" (a particular favorite), "proportion," "sovereign order." If these idealistic and scientific interpretations seem ill-matched, they can be surpassed by some passages that show a perfect hodge-podge of all the neo-classic ideas that centered around the name of "nature"—classicism, anti-intellectualism, Platonism, nature's bard, wild genius. Such a *multum in parvo* is this:

. . . From the grove
Where Wisdom talk'd with her Athenian sons,
Could my ambitious hand entwine a wreath
Of Plato's olive with the Mantuan bay,
Then should my powerful verse at once dispel
Those monkish horrors: then in light divine
Disclose the Elysian prospect, where the steps
Of those whom Nature charms, through blooming walks
Through fragrant mountains and poetic streams,
Amid the train of sages, heroes, bards,
Led by their winged Genius, and the choir
Of laurell'd science and harmonious art
Where Truth conspicuous with her sister-twins
The individual partners of her sway
With good and beauty reigns. (1. 402-17)

Indeed Akenside seems to have been much more familiar with Plato, Cicero, Addison, and Shaftesbury than with secret nooks or open spaces in the country. Scientific as he was by theory and profession, he was no real empiricist, and certainly no pragmatist. He was more fond of speculation than of observation.[45] His descriptions are extremely generalized and

[45] G. H. Potter, in "Mark Akenside, Prophet of Evolution," *MP* 24 (1926). 55-

and when he asks again,

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formal. When he needed details, as in the ode, "To the Cuckoo," he borrowed them from the conventionalized items of the pastorals.

Yet, somehow, in spite of the incongruities of his over-intellectualized and under-assimilated theories, Akenside had reached advanced views on the enrichment of man's mind by contact with nature. The mind was ever his chief concern;

> Mind, mind alone (bear witness earth and heaven!)
> The living fountains in itself contains
> Of beauteous and sublime. (1.480-2)

But the mind must be supplied with materials from without. He was as aware as Wordsworth was that all minds are not created equally susceptible to the blessings that are available. He traced the ministry of nature through various levels that are interesting in themselves, as well as for comparison with the stages Wordsworth recollected as he looked back on his youth from the hill above Tintern Abbey. The eighteenth century scale rises through intellectual, scientific, utilitarian, and physical benefits that are no part of Wordsworth, and in an impersonal style that is no kin to his confession of faith:

> The hand of Nature on peculier minds
> Imprints a different bias and to each
> Decrees its province in the common toil.
> To some she taught the fabric of the sphere,
> The changeful moon, the circuit of the stars
> The golden zones of heaven: to some she gave
> To weigh the moment of eternal things.
> Of time and space, and fate's unbroken chain,
> And will's quick impulse: others by the hand
> She led o'er vales and mountains to explore
> What healing virtue swells the tender veins
> Of herbs and flowers. (1.83-94)

But the climax of the scale is a spiritual experience (for the purest minds) that is a dilution of the "sense sublime" even

64, showed that certain lines, especially B, 2. 239 ff., indicate that to Akenside the chain of being was not fixed and immutable in the usual eighteenth century way but that creatures may "persevere to climb the ascent of being"; and that this is borne out of his scientific writings, especially his inaugural dissertation in Latin for the M. D. degree at Leyden, 1744, *De Ortu et Incremento Foetus Humani*. But his idea was purely speculative and had little or no influence.

while it is a last reflection of the old naturalistic proof of deity. Nature has destined a chosen few to reach this height:

> . . . some within a finer mould
> She wrought, and tempered with a purer flame.
> To these the Sire Omnipotent unfolds
> The world's harmonious volume, there to read
> The transcript of Himself. (1, 97-101)

It is remarkable that the man who was notoriously cold in his relations with people and whose poetry has always suffered from its aloofness yet realized that impressions from nature could have no force unless driven home by emotion. "Passion," whether the simplest pleasure-pain accompaniment of sensation or rapture like a flame, must rouse the mind, must break through

> . . . the veil
> Spun from the cobweb fashions of the times
> To hide the feeling heart? Then Nature speaks
> Her genuine language, and the words of men
> Big with the very motion of their souls,
> Declare with what accumulated force,
> The impetuous nerve of passion urges on
> The native weight and energy of things. (2. 147-54)

This passage is Wordsworthian in thought throughout and even in expression at its close.

The images stored in the mind may bring more than simple pleasure. To the properly contemplative mind nature may give instruction in her own secrets. Especially could she impart that unshakable central poise which the gentleman of the eighteenth century sought in his universe, his politics, his religion, his art, and his own inner life;

> . . . for the attentive mind
> By this harmonious action on her powers
> Becomes herself harmonious: wont so oft
> In outward things to meditate the charm
> Of sacred order, soon she seeks at home
> To find a kindred order. (3. 599-603)

Still more helpfully, nature was able to make plain to him the essential, universal principles of morality,

> . . . to rear the blooming mind,
> The unfolded powers to open, to direct

> The growth luxuriant of his young desires,
> And from the laws of this majestic world
> To teach him what was good. (2. 386-90)

But the highest gift of nature to man is a spiritual experience that makes him aware not only of God's divinity but also of his own participation in that divinity. The "blest of Heaven" cannot be lured by luxury, wealth, or honor (as Parnell and many others had said), for he has laid hold, almost unconsciously, of a power that frees him from such lower desires and quickens his spirit to treasures at once loftier and more attainable. Nature has taught him not only that the creator of the universe must be a transcendant deity, but that man himself has a divine spark that determines his destiny:

> And rolling waves, the sun's unwearied course,
> The elements and seasons: all declare
> For what the Eternal Maker has ordain'd
> The powers of man: we feel within ourselves
> His energy divine . . .
> . . . Thus the men
> Whom Nature's works can charm, with God himself
> Hold converse, grow familiar, day by day,
> With his conceptions, act upon his plan;
> And form to his, the relish of their souls. (3. 621-33)

In Addison and Blackmore the heavens and earth had proclaimed their maker. In Parnell man joined with the elements in the hymn of praise. In Akenside men rose through sympathy with nature to meet with the Eternal.

Thus at nearly the middle of the century stands a poet who, Janus-like, looked both ahead to the Romantic interpretation of nature and back to the rational, scientific treatment of Queen Anne's time. His poetry contained ideas greater than the poetry itself. Perhaps the poetry did not become great because the man was not. Anecdotes that survive show Akenside as formal, cool, humorless, and intolerant of people of lower intelligence; and his style reflects the same elegance, seriousness, and lack of human appeal. He once said of his own work that "The author pretends chiefly to the merit of endeavoring to the correct, and of carefully attending to the best models."[46] But Johnson's criticism of this endeavor was "The words are multi-

[46] Akenside, *op. cit.*, Advertisement to "Odes on Several Subjects" (pub. 1845).

plied till the sense is hardly perceived. . . . The reader wanders through the gay diffusion, sometimes amazed, and sometimes delighted, but after many turnings in the flowery labyrinth, comes out as he went in." [47] Particularly do the words multiply into a gay diffusion when he essays natural description—of the universalized sort that Johnson himself recommended—so that within the compass of seven lines he piles up "flowery level," "fair pavilion," "golden orb," "floating umbrage," and "sylvan theatre."

What Akenside did add to the conception of nature as a spiritual force in the life of man—significant as it is—differed from the Wordsworthian view, and also from Shaftesbury and Thomson, whom he followed in time and to some extent in thought, not so much in principle as in quality. It was more intellectual and theoretical. For all the words about "passion," there was no intense feeling to charge his beliefs. Instead of the intimacy of contact that Wordsworth and Keats established, there was a studied remoteness from individual experience. The life of the mind was all important; and while the ministry of external nature to that mind was welcome, it was not central, fundamental, or compelling.

These reservations in the valuation of Akenside's treatment of nature's impressions on the imaginative powers of man fit, with varying minor adjustments, the whole group of writers who searched in abstract nature for an explanation of God and of the meaning of life. They dominated the serious literature of the first quarter of the century and extended their sway at intervals for long afterwards. By reasoning they built up a theory of nature that satisfied what they considered the spiritual needs of their time. They got their conceptions from reading—especially Newton, Locke, the deists, and later Pope—and not from walking through woods or sleeping under the stars. Addison had pointed out Bacon's warning of the dangers of over-abstraction and they all insisted as much as did Wordsworth on the futility of "pride of intellect"; yet their rationalizations, simple as they were, were purely speculative, untested by reality and unenlivened by emotion. Unlike the

[47] S. Johnson, *op. cit.* 3. 417.

author of "Tintern Abbey" or the *Prelude* who first experienced and later considered, they theorized first and felt only incidentally, if at all. Unfortunately, the scientific attitude did not coincide with a great spiritual movement to inspire a poem as expressive of their age at the *Divine Comedy* was of Dante's. Poets were not yet ready to meet physicists at Wordsworth said they should " carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself "; and scientific theories had not become, as for poetry they must, " manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings." [48] Science and poetry need not be antithetical though they usually have been. And rationalism and romanticism are such large words that they often overlap. The romantic movement received some of its most potent ideas of nature from the intellectual religious arguments of the days of the Enlightenment. These elements of a future revolution were still completely, and happily, submitting to the tyranny of intellect. The main stream of literature would take almost a century to complete what Wordsworth worked out in his own experience of two or three unsettled years—a reaction from abstract reasoning. Even by the turn of a new century the rulers in the world of letters were not ready to cry with him,

> Enough of Science and of Art
> Close up those barren leaves
> Come forth and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives.[49]

The relationship of nature to God was now firmly established in literary tradition. The relationship of nature to man in any vitalizing sense was as yet hardly sensed. Man, as one of the creatures, had his own place in the " gradations just " of the great chain of being. But this conception was no incentive to soarings of the spirit. Emotional overtones were only faintly heard. Poets wrote of sun, and moon, and stars partly because they were safely remote and—as they thought—immutable. They did not have to leave London to observe the regular phases of the moon. They could point to the orderly planets as proof of a sovereign intelligence, but would never have dared cry out,

[48] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, Poetical Works* (Oxford, 1920), p. 939.
[49] " The Tables Turned."

> God, I can push the grass apart
> And lay my finger on Thy heart![50]

Even in the church there was little approval of fervour, saintliness, or mysticism; and that a man should say,

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.[51]

would have indicated "enthusiasm" gone over into madness. Yet the impregnation with the thought of God did make nature itself take on something of the "beauty of holiness." Some felt more keenly than Pope did the wonder of that "stupendous whole/ Whose body Nature is and God the Soul." And the very absorption in contemplating the God of Nature must have brought more exaltation of their human souls than they were able to reveal in their verses.

The Woman's College of U. N. C.

[50] Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Renascence."
[51] "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."

WORDSWORTH AND *THE WITCH OF ATLAS*

By John E. Jordan

None of the numerous different interpretations of Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas* as serious allegory seems either consonant with the tone of the verse or capable of being consistently followed through the poem. No more satisfactory is the suggestion that the piece is sheer fantasy, a fanciful escape from reality, for, although the poem is playful, it is not honest fancy. There is about *The Witch* a tone of burlesque, a tinge of the farcical; there is intentional exaggeration, strained diction, and a kind of subtly awkward, comic vein. Often there is something of the tone of the opening stanzas of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the tenour of a bombastic exercise. In short, it seems as if Shelley were trying to be funny.

This humorous intention, if such there be, does not display itself in every line, or even in every stanza. There are bits which are light and gay, breathing the spirit of pure fancy; there are other passages in which Shelley touches upon a favorite idea and loses himself in it. Most of the time, however, he was writing with his tongue in his cheek. A reader accustomed to take Shelley seriously may miss the subtle humor, which is a thing of tone and feeling and cannot be demonstrated except in its most obvious manifestations. Shelley sounds the key in the first stanza:

> Before those cruel Twins, whom at one birth
> Incestous Change bore to her father Time,
> Error and Truth, had hunted from the Earth
> All those bright natures which adorned its prime,
> And left us nothing to believe in, worth
> The pains of putting into learnèd rhyme,
> A lady-witch there lived on Atlas' mountain
> Within a cavern, by a secret fountain (49-56).

Observe the sententiousness, the bombastic promise of writing a " learnèd rhyme " about an era before the birth of truth, and the laughing change of tone at " a lady-witch." Throughout the poem there are strained or obscure phrases and absurd con-

ceits. The "moon is in a fit" (70), and the serpent is "in the golden flame of his own volumes intervolved" (91-2). We read of "vapour-belted pyramids" (504), "woven exhalations" (466), "enwombèd rocks" (126), "The intertexture of the atmosphere" (463), and the Witch's "closed feet" (272). There are such banal couplets as:

> the lady lone,
> Sitting upon a seat of emerald stone (111-12).

and

> full even to the brim,
> And overflowing all the margin trim (279-80).

Sheer mockery is evident in Shelley's description of the Witch's boat:

> She had a boat, which some say Vulcan wrought
> For Venus, as the chariot of her star;
> But it was found too feeble to be fraught
> With all the ardours in that sphere which are,
> And so she sold it, and Apollo bought
> And gave it to his daughter: from a car
> Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat
> Which ever upon mortal stream did float (289-96).

Not only does Venus engage in a little merchandising on the side, but Cupid is described as "like a horticultural adept," planting the seed which grew into a kind of gourd,

> Of which Love scooped this boat—and with soft motion
> Piloted it around the circumfluous ocean (311-12).

Is there not gentle ridicule in the awkward phraseology and incongruous images with which Shelley tells the story? The Witch got into the boat

> and took her seat
> Beside the rudder, with opposing feet (343-4).

> And ever as she went, the Image lay
> With folded wings and unawakened eyes;
> And o'er its gentle countenance did play
> The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies (361-4).

In picturing the wanderings of the Witch, Shelley lets himself go in the most exaggerated fashion, piling hyperbolical image upon straining fancy. Take for example the three whole stanzas

required to say only that the Hermaphrodite pulled the boat [1]—how elaborately it is done. Or better still, look at the description of the Witch's austral domain,[2] where "the tremulous stars sparkled unfathomably" and the cormorant's wing

> Looked like the wreck of some wind-wandering
> Fragment of inky thunder-smoke (446-8).

The humor gets broader toward the end of the poem as the Witch starts her reforms. Shelley seems to be plainly laughing at facile dreams of immortality in the following stanza:

> For on the night when they were buried, she [3]
> Restored the embalmers' ruining, and shook
> The light out of the funeral lamps, to be
> A mimic day within the deathy nook;
> And she unwound the woven imagery
> Of second childhood's swaddling bands, and took
> The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche,
> And threw it with contempt into a ditch (601-08).

An edge of sarcasm come into the humor:

> the lying scribe
> Would his own lies betray without a bribe (623-24).

Lovers sport innocently in their dreams until the tenth moon awakens them to the reality of their joys.[4] And soldiers

> dreamed that they were blacksmiths, and [3]
> Walked out of quarters in somnambulism;
> Round the anvils you might see them stand
> Like Cyclopses in Vulcan's sooty abyss (641-4).

The amazing rhymes and figures of these last four lines would be alone enough to warrant the conclusion that Shelley either was trying to be ineptly funny or was entirely devoid of any sense of humor. Perhaps the solution lies in some particular reason for his attempting to be humorous in an awkward and almost unconscious fashion. That reason could be that he was

[1] Lines 394-416.
[2] Lines 425-48.
[3] Note the use of trivial rhyme words, in itself an indication of the burlesque nature of the poem.
[4] Lines 649-55.

mocking Wordsworth. Some connection between *The Witch* and *Peter Bell* is apparent from the fact that three stanzas, or half of the introductory verses which are supposed to explain the poem to Mary, are devoted to Wordsworth's *Peter*.[5] The Witch " is not so sweet a creature as Ruth or Lucy . . . but she matches Peter." Shelley derides Peter as " A lean mark, hardly fit to fling a rhyme at " (44). Could it be that he *did* fling a rhyme at Peter and his creator in *The Witch of Atlas*, and that the Witch " matches " him in being his opposite?

Most commentators have assumed that Mary, disappointed by Shelley's playful *Witch*, held *Peter Bell* up to him as a much better model to follow, thus provoking his attack on Wordsworth's poem in the introduction. Mary may well have done this—in fact her sponsorship of *Peter Bell* may have come also before *The Witch*, and may have instigated it. But there are other connections between Shelley and *Peter*. We know that Shelley was sufficiently aroused by *Peter Bell* in October, 1819, to write a harsh satirical parody of it, *Peter Bell the Third*. That poem was an attack on Wordsworth for his lack of social awareness. Shelley comments in a note that *Peter Bell* " contains curious evidence of the gradual hardening of a strong but circumscribed sensibility, of the perversion of a penetrating but panic-stricken understanding."[6] It is not strange, then, to find Shelley ten months later making fun of Wordsworth's aesthetic code of the commonplace, by handling the supernatural in the same way that Wordsworth did the natural. In *Peter Bell the Third* Shelley hits Wordsworth's fossilized morality; in *The Witch of Atlas* he mocks Wordsworth's literary technique also.

Significantly, Wordsworth ennunciates his aesthetic code in his letter dedicating *Peter Bell* to Southey:

> The Poem of Peter Bell . . . was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents of daily life.

This idea he expounds also in his Prologue, using the figure of

[5] Lines 25-48.
[6] Note to *Peter Bell the Third*, line 588.

a boat to represent supernatural imagination: "And now I *have* a little Boat" (cf. Shelley's "she had a boat"). It was a "living boat" (cf. Shelley's "a living spirit within all its frame") which carried him through the heavens; but he mistrusted it, and wanting to get his feet back on the ground, bid the little boat "adieu" with

> Temptation lurks among your words;
> But, while these pleasures you're pursuing
> Without impediment or let,
> No wonder if you quite forget
> What on earth is doing (116-20).

Did not Shelley, as champion of the extranatural, get into the boat and demonstrate that fancy does not necessarily forget what the world is doing? His prankish Witch is intensely interested in humanity. And she is a much more fascinating figure than Wordsworth's prosaic Peter, who travels not in a fairy boat, but astride a very earthly ass. Wordsworth is painful in his obvious desire to edify with the strained, absurd narration of the meanness of a commonplace man. Shelley runs circles around him, apes his awkward style, soars to heights of sententiousness and descends to depths of ridicule. The Witch, if she has any identity, is free poetic fancy, though, like all of Shelley's feminine divinities, she resembles Intellectual Beauty. Of course she is in every respect the opposite of Peter Bell—as different as her virginity is from his twelvetimes-wedded state. The Hermaphrodite may be only another supernatural extravagance, or it may even be the counterpart of Peter's ass.

The present hypothesis to explain *The Witch of Atlas*, then, is as follows. As Shelley climbed the slopes of Mount San Pellegrino he somehow got to thinking about the proper subject matter for poetry. Perhaps Mary had again been urging him to write poetry with a popular appeal. In mulling over the possibilities of the supernatural, he turned up the attack upon it in *Peter Bell*, a poem which had made such a strong negative impression upon him. Being in a playful frame of mind, he dashed off a clever little poem mocking Wordsworth's thesis and poking fun at his total lack of a sense of humor in the practice of it. Shelley's idea, I believe, was to write an entirely supernatural poem which appeared every bit as "noble" in its re-

forms as Wordsworth's edifying piece. It was to be funny and absurd, sententious and ridiculous; we need not try to trace any consistent allegory. Since he apparently made no effort to publish it, he probably wrote it for his own pleasure. He was, as he told Mary,[7] a kitten leaping and playing, but even a kitten is like the cat it grows up to be, and he could not keep some of his favorite ideas from slipping in, as indeed there was no reason why they should not. And usually a kitten plays with something besides its own tail—was not Wordsworth Shelley's mouse?

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[7] Lines 5-7.

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